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The Multicolored Patchwork Portraiture of an Effective Veteran High School Special Education Teacher Amidst the Tempest of the High Stakes Testing Movement

Vaughn Bicehouse

THE MULTICOLORED PATCHWORK PORTRAITURE OF AN EFFECTIVE VETERAN HIGH SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER AMIDST THE TEMPEST OF THE HIGH STAKES TESTING MOVEMENT

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By

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ABSTRACT

THE MULTICOLORED PATCHWORK PORTRAITURE OF AN EFFECTIVE VETERAN HIGH SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER AMIDST THE TEMPEST OF THE HIGH STAKES TESTING MOVEMENT

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Dissertation supervised by Launcelot Brown, Ph.D. and Rose Mary Mautino, Ph.D.

This single-subject study used the art and science of portraiture to illuminate a veteran special education teacher who is meeting the needs of her students with disabilities. This qualitative study was not done for the purposes of generalization but rather to show how this remarkable and effective special educator acts as an inspirational educational leader and inspires both her students and her fellow teachers.

The movement to hold schools accountable for the educational performance of students with disabilities is fairly new in the United States. Since the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975, states have been directed to provide a free and appropriate education for all students with disabilities

(Gallagher, 2000; Rothstein, 1995). The cornerstone of special education is to provide specialized instruction to meet the unique needs of each child with a disability. Special educators are expected to utilize individualized referenced decision-making and continually plan and adjust curriculum and strategies to educate and motivate their students. Unfortunately, given the current educational climate that is focused on high stakes testing, standards, student achievement, and school accountability, many of today's special education teachers have taken the "special" out of special education and are employing a general education utilitarian approach to service their students (Hardman & Dawson, 2008).

The teacher in this portraiture explored and analyzed norms, patterns, and complexities of her journey as a special educator. She discussed her vision to inspire students to set and reach individual goals. She also divulged how she collaborates and inspires other professionals to do the same. Ultimately, she described how she is implementing the current high stakes testing, data-driven, decision-making assessment model with her students with disabilities. The findings make a compelling case for having tailor-teacher leaders in the field of special education. These teachers, like the one in this study, know how to meet the individual needs of each student and create a vision, shape values, and empower change so that students with disabilities can continue to receive specialized instruction and service delivery models in supportive and caring educational environments in today's standards driven schools.

DEDICATION

To all children with disabilities:

Keep Helen Keller's words close to your heart.

"Your success and happiness lies in you. Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against difficulties."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me." Matthew 25:37-40 (The Message)

Thank you to my heavenly Father for making this opportunity possible. Hopefully, this endeavor will help to provide light and encouragement to your children who need it the most.

Patti, Grace, Eli – this could not have happened without your love, encouragement, sacrifice, and support. Thank you for believing in me and inspiring me to finish.

Mom and Dad – this is for you. Your unconditional love of God and all of his children have given birth to my dreams and desire to help those around me. Thank you for being such wonderful role models.

Dr. Brown – thank you hardly seems like enough. Your life is your work and I appreciate your excellence. Thank you for going above and beyond in helping me to navigate this process. I couldn't have done this without your expertise and steady guidance.

Dr. Mautino – it has been a privilege and honor to work with you. You find the good in all of those around you and inspire others to do the same. Thank you so much for sharing your time, talents, and resources. Your kindness will not be forgotten.

Dr. O’Shea – it was you who inspired me to complete this degree and to become a special educator who isn’t afraid to stand up for those children who need you the most. I hope someday to be half the professor that you are each and every day.

Last but not least, to all the tailor-teachers who have inspired me along life’s journey. Thank you for making a difference. Thank you for lighting the way as I navigated my passageway through the unknown terrain. You indeed provide quilts from the storms of life: Wayne, Melanie, Donna, Betsy, Alicia, Patty, Reece, and Dr. Bob.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Tailor Teacher by Vaughn L. Bicehouse

A teacher is like a sewing machine.
Its purpose is to repair, improve, create: all dealing with and
Accommodating for a variety of materials.
A good teacher remediates, improves skills, addresses emotional
Needs, and teaches skills to create relationships and utilize information.
The teacher does this with a wide variety of needs that the students
Bring into the classroom.
Each child is a different piece of material.
Each has his/her own needs, gifts, and talents.
The teaching expertise of the teacher is the thread.
All year long the teacher works diligently sewing the different
Pieces of material together.
Start and stop, start and stop goes the machine.
At times mistakes are made and corrections must follow.
Often the teacher has to start over. Start and stop, start and stop.
When the year is over the teacher has created something beautiful.
The teacher has sown a quilt.
The quilt shows the whole picture; but each patch shows the uniqueness of each child.
Quilts provide warmth from the storms of life.
Good teachers may never know how many lives they have touched.
As long as there is material, they keep right on sewing patches.
The day will come when they can no longer sew but they will have
Years of memories and beautiful quilts to keep them warm.

1.1 Introduction to the Problem

"Insight, I believe, refers to the depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another" (Bateson, 1989, p.2). This study searches for this type of understanding and illumination. The researcher and portraitist for this study comes to the field of special education leadership with what the science of portraiture calls "an intellectual framework" and set of guiding research questions. This framework is the result of exploring pertinent literature, prior experience in the field in similar settings, a general knowledge of the field of inquiry, and a personal familiarity with the topic as a parent of a daughter with disabilities. This study is also framed with what is known in the science of portraiture as "the researcher's autobiographical journey" – the aspects of his own "familial, cultural, developmental, and educational background" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 185).

This researcher's autobiographical journey is drawn together with the need for this study. This study examines an exemplary special education teacher who by her commitment, passion, instruction and consistency of beliefs, emulates an effective teacher leader in the field of special education. Knowing what constitutes an effective special education teacher will make a difference in how people think about providing services to students with disabilities. Finding a special education teacher that is meeting the needs of her students will make a difference in the lives of students, teachers, and parents of children with disabilities. Therein lies the purpose of this study; to use the art and science of portraiture and illuminate a charismatic and effective teacher in the field of special education.

1.2 The First Piece of the Patchwork: Personal Experiences

"Your daughter has epilepsy. I'm transferring your call to schedule a follow-up appointment." "Epilepsy? What are you talking about? There has to be some mistake. My six year old daughter doesn't have epilepsy. What exactly is epilepsy?" My head was reeling. I suddenly felt nauseous, panic stricken, fearful, and bewildered. I hung up the telephone and stared out our picture window in disbelief. The trees on this blustery fall day were barren and I could see my daughter swinging on the jungle gym flailing in the wind. Suddenly and distinctly I could hear Grace's squeals of joy, "Again! Again! Again Daddy!" just like when I had so often enthusiastically shoved her yellow toddler swing back and forth as the sun reflected on her pink chubby cheeks. Epilepsy! My thoughts, like the swing in front of me, were contorted and spinning out of control on this cold, damp, and dreary fall day.

Grace had been having problems in kindergarten. The teacher reported that she was anxious, distracted, and having difficulty processing directions. The constant calls from school left me questioning what was occurring in the classroom. The teacher would call to say that Grace was bothered by the noise of the classroom and covering her ears. The teacher would call to say Grace was asking to go to the nurse. The teacher would call to say Grace was getting up and leaving the classroom. The teacher would call to say Grace was climbing under her desk. The teacher would call to say that Grace was hiding under the teacher's desk. Needless to say as parents we were exasperated and confused.

Was our quiet six year old daughter having separation anxiety? Was this young creative teacher too unstructured to meet Grace's need for safety? Were there students bullying Grace in the kindergarten classroom? The teacher suggested that maybe Grace

was a worrier and too attached to her parents. After fruitless meetings with the teacher, principal, and school nurse, we decided to consult Grace's pediatrician. The pediatrician sent Grace to Children's Hospital for a battery of tests. We felt confident that Grace's tests would all be negative. Epilepsy came as a shock.

The first grade teacher said, "I've never had a child in my class with epilepsy. I don't feel comfortable having her in my class." My eyes turned toward the principal as this teacher balked at the thought of having Grace in her class. As a lifelong special education teacher, I have been a part of countless IEP meetings. No meeting, however, was quite like the first IEP meeting as a parent on behalf of my daughter. I was consumed with trepidation about my child. I hoped and prayed that I could protect her, nurture her, give her the supports she needs to develop and grow. All of that became magnified when told my child had a disability. Worry, plan, read, and wait. Wait until the child's next seizure. Wait until the next doctor's appointment. Wait and depend on professionals to direct, help, and encourage you. I waited for the principal's response to this first grade teacher. Are they going to educate my child?

Sadly, the unfortunate experience at my first IEP meeting was often repeated. Teachers openly admitted they were not sure how to help Grace. Ignorance, fear, annoyance, and condescension were all too often characteristic emotions displayed at these meetings by the very professionals charged with helping my daughter get what they called an "appropriate education." I was seeking competent and caring special education teachers who knew how to apply their areas of expertise to create meaningful educational opportunities that addressed Grace's unique needs. I was hoping for educators who would inspire my daughter to reach her potential and empower her with the specialized

instruction and supports she needed to bring that to fruition. I was looking for effective teachers who knew how to collaborate and create innovative strategies to meet the social, academic, behavioral, and transitional needs of their students. Unfortunately, I did not find leaders among special education personnel and resources that were available to me.

I propose that special education, now more than ever, needs effective teachers. Special education needs what Stronge (2007) explained are the "imperative qualities" of effective teachers that include "dimensions of instructional expertise, student assessment, learning environment, and personal qualities of the teacher" (2007, p.168). Stronge based his qualities on what "experts and stakeholders" think effective teachers do and what "education research" has shown to be significant determinants of effective teachers. In the field of special education, the need for effective teachers is greater than ever. Today's teachers must be proficient in delivering instruction to diverse populations of students with disabilities in a variety of educational settings. Special education is awash with what Jane Humphrey, the Council for Exceptional Children's 2003 teacher of the year, espouses is all too common in the field, "teachers with lots of paper credentials who don't do a very good job" (Warburton, 2003, p.74). The field of special education needs more, special education needs effective teachers.

1.3 The Second Piece of the Patchwork: Teacher Effectiveness

Based on years of research, Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman (2007) developed a table of teacher effectiveness dimensions and related research which highlights four dimensions of teacher effectiveness. These include instruction, student assessment, learning environment, and personal teacher qualities (2007, p. 168). The categories help establish an environment where students achieve academically, socially, and emotionally.

The table by Stronge et al. also identifies methodologies for teacher effectiveness.

Table 1 ***Summary of teacher effectiveness dimensions and related research (as cited in J. Pers Educ (2007) p.169***

Dimensions of Teacher Effectiveness	Representative Research Base
Instruction	Allington 2002; Darling-Hammond 2000; Johnson 1997; Wenglinsky 2000
Focus on instruction	
Expectations for achievement	Peart and Campbell 1991; Wenglinsky 2002; Good and Brophy 1997; Jay 202; Shellard and Protheroe 2000; Pressley et al. 2004; Walsh and Sattes 2005; Weiss et al. 2003 Eisner 2003/2004; Peart and Campbell 1991; Sternberg 2003; Zahorik et al. 2003
Planning for instruction	
Range of strategies	
Questioning	
Student Engagement	Cawelti 2004; Walsh and Sattes 2005; Wenglinsky 2002
Homework	Allington 2002; Berliner 1986; Cawelti 2004; Cotton 2000; Johnson 1997
Student Assessment	Cotton 2000; Foegen et al. 2007; Janisch and Johnson 2003; Yesseldyke and Bolt 2005
Monitor student progress	
Differentiation	Shellard and Protheroe 2000; Tomlinson 1999, 2003; VanTassel-Baska 2005
Learning environment	Johnson 1997; Marzano et al. 2003; Pressley et al. 2004; Wang et al.1993
Classroom management	
Organization	McLeod et al. 2003; Zahorik et al. 2003
Behavioral expectations	Good and Brophy 1997; Hamre and Pianta 2005; Marzano 2003; Pressley et al. 2004
Personal qualities	Boyle-Baise 2005; Collinson et al. 1999; McBer 2000; Peart and Campell 1999; Corbet and Wilson 2002; Cruickshank and Haefele 200l; Darling-Hammond 2001; Peart and Campbell 1999
Caring	
Fairness and respect	
Interactions with students	
Enthusiasm and motivation	Rowan et al. 1997; Quek 2005
Attitude toward teaching	Hamre and Pianta 2005; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality 2003
Reflective practice	Cruickshank and Haefele 2001; Good and Brophy 1997

Those four dimensions of teacher effectiveness provide insight into what categories are important when providing developmentally appropriate practices to help educate students. Given the fact that special education is a viable, dynamic, and changing field, it is imperative that there are effective teacher leaders who have the foresight and vision to lead so that students can continue to learn and grow in the current high-stakes testing environment.

This study examines the four effectiveness frameworks through the eyes of the teacher in this study to see if she displays any of Stronge's dimensions. Although Stronge's et al. table was designed with general education teachers in mind, an effective educator in the field of special education is one who is able to use a variety of teaching strategies to ensure students' success and progress in meaningful activities. Therefore, the checklist of effective behaviors helps to provide a model of what areas constitute an effective teacher in general education and special education by viewing the teacher as a person; the teacher as a classroom manager and organizer; the teacher as an effective instructor; and the teacher as a monitor of student progress and potential.

Given my experiences with Grace, and practices I have witnessed in the field, this study proposes showcasing a highly effective teacher whose effectiveness is exhibited through her commitment, passion, and instruction, along with consistency of beliefs, creativity, and innovations. The researcher will showcase a teacher who exhibits the characteristics of an effective teacher in the field of special education. This individual has spent years in the field as a vigilant practitioner servicing the needs of others while envisioning how to improve the field by designing and implementing adaptations to meet

the challenges of changing times. Indeed, she is a tailor-teacher leader in the field of special education who creates a quilt "from the storms of life."

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The cornerstone of special education is to provide specialized instruction to meet the unique needs of each child with a disability. Special educators are expected to utilize individualized referenced decision-making and continually plan and adjust curriculum and strategies to educate and motivate their students. Unfortunately, given the current educational climate that is focused on standards, student achievement, and school accountability, many of today's special education teachers have taken the "special" out of special education and are employing a general education utilitarian approach to service their students with disabilities (Hardman & Dawson, 2008).

The infusion of high stakes testing has become the accepted model to demonstrate individual academic performance of all students including those students with disabilities. Rather than focusing on individualized goals as specified in a student's IEP, both special education and general education teachers have been requiring all students to learn the same thing at the same time and in the same way (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007).

This one-dimensional focus on data driven decision-making has been especially disconcerting, unproductive, and damaging for many students like Grace, who have disabilities. Indeed, they are often left feeling disconnected, devalued, and alone (Casbarro, 2004). This is evidenced in the high number of students with IEP's who drop out of school. They are twice as likely to drop out of school as their peers without disabilities (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). In addition, special education

teachers with the charge of supporting these students with disabilities are leaving the field in droves, which is causing widespread teacher shortages (Boe, 2006; Liming & Wolf, 2008).

According to the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (2008) it is vital for students in special education programs to have consistent valuable relationships with adults who can help them deal with the shortcomings of their struggles with academic content. "In special education, the most significant variables have little to do with curriculum details and mandated exams; they have everything to do with the lived experience of important human relationships" (Donlevy, 2001, p. 8). This means building a relationship of trust between the student and the teacher so that students will put forth effort to master the academic tasks and master social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. Therein lies the problem that requires effective teachers in the field of special education.

The mantra of "leave no child behind" is a pledge rather than a reality in today's public schools. Plainly, research is needed to directly support or refute the supposition within national educational policy that a standards-based education system will improve results for students with disabilities. Nevertheless, special education teachers are on the front lines of implementing a standards-driven system for their students while maintaining the core practices of individualization, intensive instruction, and the teaching of explicit skills for students with disabilities. This requires effective teachers who are leaders in the field of special education.

1.5 The Third Piece of the Patchwork: Teacher Leadership

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) defined teacher leadership as, "Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice" (p.5). This view of teacher leadership is significant in special education where teachers are required to have the knowledge and skills to work collaboratively in partnership with colleagues, professionals, and families to provide an authentic and inclusive education for all students. According to Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann (2002), teacher leaders do their utmost to help fellow practitioners attain success for all students in school. This involves using "interpersonal skills that build trusting, communicative, and collaborative relationships with teachers" (p.43).

Leithwood and Duke (1999) conducted a review of the concepts of leadership in educational leadership from 1988 to 1995. Their comprehensive review of educational leadership fails to provide a definitive definition of an educational leader, principal leader, or teacher leadership. Their research does, however, reveal that there is some agreement that an educational leader possesses certain interpersonal qualities in order for change to materialize in schools. Briefly, educational leaders hold a "can-do" attitude and believe they can make a difference by positively impacting those around them.

By studying school leaders Leithwood and Duke identified six areas that come into play when educational leaders focus their attention on themselves, their followers, their organizations, and the outside environment. These areas of leadership include: "instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, participative leadership, managerial leadership, and contingent leadership" (Lashway, 2003, p.2).

These leadership areas often overlap and underscore the direction of the educational leader.

James MacGregor Burns (1978), the forefather of transformational leadership supports the view that leadership must be aligned with a collective purpose, and effective leaders evaluated by their ability to make positive changes. In his (2003) book entitled, Transforming Leadership: A New pursuit of Happiness, Burns suggests that transforming leaders focus on individuals' "wants and needs" and find ways to "expand opportunities for happiness" (p. 230). Burns studied renowned world leaders throughout the ages to see how their leadership styles promoted positive changes for their followers.

Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't (2001) author, Jim Collins, also studied leaders to look for common characteristics of successful leaders. While Burns studied political and civic leaders, Collins examined both Fortune 500 companies and successful non-profit organizations to see what common characteristics could be found in great leaders of successful companies and organizations. Collins determined that level five leaders – his notion of great leaders – exhibit both humility and a burning passion for the cause and the individuals they serve. Collins called this, "enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of humility and professional will" (p. 20). These leaders give others credit for successes and take the blame for failures. Collins states that great leaders have "a burning ambition – for the cause, for the company, for the work, for the third-grade kids – combined with a ferocious will to make good on the cause: these kids will read, it's not about me, it's about the kids" (Collins, 2007, p.3). While Burns and Collins focused primarily on business and organizational

leadership their notion of putting the needs of followers first may be applicable to education where the students are the by-product of the system.

Both Burns and Collins espouse that good leaders possess distinctive personal values whereby they model, coach, and provide feedback empowering others to transform and change. (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008) state that this is known as using their "emotional intelligence" (p.506). Briefly, this involves the leader being aware of their emotions and being able to influence the emotions of others. According to Leithwood and Jantzi, this would involve inspiring others to improve the "quality of teaching and learning" (p. 507).

Author Maya Angelou agrees that inspiring others to act is a hallmark of good teaching. She says that the value of a teacher is looking at students and saying "I believe you can do it" (as cited in Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Indeed, "there's something behind that face and I want to reach that person, I want to encourage that person, I want to enrich, I want to call out that person who is behind that face, behind that color, behind that language, behind that tradition, behind that culture. These inspirational teacher leaders can provide what Bass & Aviolo (1994) coined as "inspirational motivation" whereby the followers put forth extra effort to succeed because their leader believes in their abilities.

Given the current high stakes testing environment in today's schools; special education teachers interested in implementing school reform need to inspire their students with disabilities with this can-do attitude to achieve. Author Steven Covey (1989) says these teachers possess a "character ethic" because their principles are firm and so is their belief in student potential. This means that they employ an active leadership that

challenges the status quo, inspires a vision, models the way, and collaborates using specific practices and strategies to attempt the unknown.

From discussions with teachers, parents, and my experiences as a special educator and a parent of a child with a disability, special education is currently lacking these inspirational educational leaders who can inspire both their students and their fellow teachers. The investigator designates these teachers as tailor-teachers. A tailor-teacher is one whose pedagogy is to thread together a variety of teaching strategies to ensure students' success. These tailor-teacher leaders know how to meet the individual needs of each student and create a vision, shape values, and empower change so that students with disabilities can continue to receive specialized instruction and service delivery models in supportive and caring educational environments in today's standards driven schools.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to learn how an effective teacher demonstrates the characteristics of an inspirational leader in the field of special education as defined by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), and has been able to consistently and efficiently work with students who have disabilities. Within this context we will discover, probe, explore, and capture the essence of the veteran teacher, who is highly recognized by colleagues in her district and in the field of special education.

1.7 Research Questions

In short, this study will address the overarching questions that mirror the characteristics of an inspirational and effective teacher.

1. What characteristics of leadership have been shown to be successful when meeting the needs of students with disabilities?

2. How are the current challenges of incorporating high stakes testing affecting the curriculum along with individual lesson plans and Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities?

3. How are those challenges being successfully addressed by a veteran special education teacher who is considered to be a leader in the field?

4. What does it mean to be an effective teacher in the field of special education in the current educational climate?

1.8 Need for the Study

In the Leadership Project (2004), Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom extensively reviewed how leadership influences learning. They claim that the evidence purports that that there is a common core of practices that any first-rate leader calls upon. These leaders: "identify and articulate a vision, foster the acceptance of group goals, and create high performance expectations (p. 8). These leadership practices are evidenced in schools by "offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support, and providing best practice and beliefs considered fundamental to the organization" (p. 9). Accordingly, this contribution to student learning depends on the motivations and capacities of both teachers and administrators.

The Leadership Project authors note that considerable amounts of variation in learning are accounted for by teachers' abilities. They cite (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002) who specify "basic skills, subject matter content knowledge, pedagogical skill, pedagogical content knowledge, and classroom experience" as critical skills for teachers to help their students succeed. In addition, they cite (DiMaggio, 1997; Toole, 2001; Newmann, 1996) on the importance of teachers having mental models that result in

good pedagogy. Briefly, the mental models of teachers determine how they tailor their practices and provide meaningful experiences to all students to connect the classroom to the real world. This involves being part of a learning community where teacher collaboration is vital and ongoing to "improve student outcomes" (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 66). With the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act-1990 (IDEA) and NCLB, today's teachers are required to not only develop, but also make use of strategies backed with scientific rigor that effectively teaches all students. Special education teachers are mandated to use alternative strategies that meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

Given the stated goal of contemporary teachers having a pedagogy that effectively educates students, there is a need to study a teacher in special education who is effectively educating students. There is a need to study a teacher who is inspirational by using both her experience and pedagogy to model, inspire, encourage, and enable others to educate students with disabilities. This study is designed to give voice to such a teacher; a teacher who is considered by her colleagues to be a transformational leader in the field of special education. This teacher will provide a personal perspective to the history and best practices of special education that transcends traditional timelines and updates what is available in textbooks. The intent of this study is to highlight an effective service delivery model in the field of special education, particularly at the secondary level. This researcher believes that by providing this model, ultimately teachers will have a model they can emulate when working with students with disabilities to keep these students on track to both graduation and transitioning from school to the community.

1.9 Scope and Limitations

As with any study, this research is naturally constrained by assumptions and limitations. Limitations must be considered within the context of the overall study and its findings, as they do have the potential to impact results if they are not acknowledged and appropriately managed. The limitations of the study include the limited sample size of one veteran Pennsylvania special educator. This single person case study has been deemed acceptable based on the selected methodology and intent to illuminate the beliefs, pedagogical approaches and strategies of one special educator who is perceived to be making a difference in the lives of her students with disabilities (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997).

This case study is portraiture of an effective inspirational teacher-leader in special education. As defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis (1997), portraiture documents human behavior and experience in context to gain profound understanding and authenticity. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis (p. 12) likens this to putting together a quilt by piecing together emergent "themes and patterns" that can only be garnered by careful and systematic description made possible by watching, listening to, and interacting with an individual over a sustained period of time. For that reason, this methodology is appropriate to combine empirical and aesthetic descriptions that will become woven into the story of an inspirational tailor-teacher who warms the hearts, minds, and lives of students with disabilities while individualizing instruction to meet their unique needs.

1.10 Methodology

As a qualitative, single-person, research case study, the research will highlight an accomplished teacher leader who is thriving and inspiring her students to succeed despite the ongoing changes in the field of special education. Using a series of carefully planned interviews with the teacher, the researcher will create a detailed portrait of this visionary inspirational teacher who meets the academic, social, and emotional needs of her students with disabilities. Ultimately, this study will provide hope to countless teachers, students, and parents who are desperately seeking committed, caring, and competent professionals in the field of special education who can weave together a tapestry of opportunity and success.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Challenges in Special Education

Special education is a viable, dynamic, and changing field. As special education approaches its thirty-fifth anniversary in the United States, questions about the current state of the field must be examined. Much has changed since its beginning but much more change is needed.

Years of legislation and litigation now guarantee students with disabilities the right to an appropriate public education, but many of today's students are feeling abandoned, frustrated, and helpless as schools seem to be increasingly focused on higher student achievement and high stakes testing. Supervisor of Assessment in Massachusetts, Salvatore Terrasi, stated "Special education students are feeling a level of anxiety we have not seen before. The net effect has been an increase in dropout rates" (quoted in Frase-Blunt, 2000, p.1). Much has changed but much more change is needed.

Now, more than ever, special education teachers have greater access to college courses and professional development activities to help them become "highly qualified" (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001), but teacher attrition rates are at an all-time high with seven percent to fifteen percent of all special educators leaving the field each and every year (McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004). This means that every four years more than half of special educators are departing. Major factors contributing to this high attrition rate include job dissatisfaction, role overload, and student characteristics and challenges (Billingsley, 2003; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). Moreover, there is a lack of theoretically and technically adequate measures of teacher quality in special

education (Desimone, 2009). That means that there is currently no conceptual framework to study the effects of special educators' professional development on fellow teachers and students. Subsequently, there is no general understanding of how best to shape teacher learning opportunities to maximize learning for their students with disabilities. Boe, Shin, and Cook's work (2007) has shown that special education continues to struggle with a shortage of fully qualified teachers from the late 1970's until the present. This highlights the ongoing need for competent and committed leaders in the field who know how to plan and implement best practices to help their students succeed.

Parents of students with disabilities are encouraged that schools are now required to provide individual transition planning to prepare their son or daughter for their future careers. Unfortunately, recent unemployment rates for adults with disabilities have now reached over 70% demonstrating, among other reasons, a lack of preparedness of students with disabilities for adult life (Storey, Bates, & Hunter, 2008). Additionally, school districts often strapped for cash are cutting back on transition coordinators and using a skeletal bare bones approach to meet the letter of the law regarding transition planning services.

2.2 Leadership in Special Education

There is a noticeable silence in the literature regarding leadership among teachers in the field of special education. Even more distressing is the lack of research pertaining to models of effective teacher leaders in special education. Special education has been a field of possibilities shaped by progressive thinkers who believed in the moral values of dignity, worth, and acceptance. Since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA), special education has been considered a service rather than a specific place

to send students. Practitioners in the field are expected to have the expertise, commitment, and abilities to meet the needs of their students. Sadly, all too often special education teachers fail to meet these expectations (Pion, Smith, & Tyler, 2003; Sindelar & Rosenberg, 2003). As the field is yet again undergoing tremendous changes, the researcher's years of experience have repeatedly taught him that it is critically important to have teachers who can rise to the occasion to effectively include and educate all students with disabilities. This requires effective teachers who center on the gestalt and the uniqueness of the students they are servicing.

Therefore, this review examines leadership from the perspective of effective teachers, which is a leadership that inspires people and invites capacity development according to Leithwood & Jantzi (2008). The first section of this literature review provides discussion of the literature related to teacher leadership in education. The second section provides insight into the qualities of effective teachers. The third section discusses special education and its need for effective teacher leaders.

"Without a vision the people will perish" (Proverbs 29:18 New International Version). This quote from the book of Proverbs stands the test of time. Michael Fullan (2001) claims that visionary leadership in the United States is in short supply. Bookstores are filled with books about leaders and leadership, but the average citizen seems disillusioned, disappointed, and disengaged regarding the question of what makes an effective leader. The implications for teachers of special education, especially with parents who feel that educational leaders are in short supply, are immense. They must inspire confidence in parents, administrators, and the students they educate. They must also meet the challenges of high-stakes testing despite the fact that many parents and

students have grave concerns about what they think is an overemphasis on these achievement tests.

Nowhere is the leadership crisis more evident than in public schools. The now infamous A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform (1983) report espoused that the American public education system lacked leaders with a vision and was "awash in mediocrity" (Meier, 2002). Since that report, public schools leaders have been scrambling to make changes to their systems. The passage of No Child Left Behind (2001) required districts to implement a standards driven curriculum model. Teachers are on the frontlines of implementing this standards driven system with its goal of 100% student proficiency in both reading and mathematics by 2014. Whether this federal mandate improves the quality of student education or becomes another "fatal remedy" (Sieber, 1981) depends primarily on the commitment, competence, and leadership capacity of administrators and teachers. Special educators of children with disabilities are especially cognizant of meeting the ever-increasing demands of state testing requirements as they face the dual pressure of providing a general education curriculum that best accommodates the needs of their students with Individualized Education Programs, (IEP)'s. This requires leaders in the field of special education who can activate continued growth and improvement in providing educational services for students with disabilities.

Leadership in education is only recently being recognized as a separate field worthy of study. To date there is no comprehensive, agreed upon idea of what teacher leadership is, how it can work, and whether or not it can be used for school reform (Harris, 2003; Lord & Miller, 2000). Teacher leadership is more of a defining strand in a larger reform effort rather than a distinct strategy" (Murphy, 2005, p.4). For advocates of

teacher leadership, there are two primary ways of viewing teacher leadership. One is the traditional view where some teachers are leaders. Teachers are no different from other leaders in government, business, organizations, and communities. Not everyone leads. Some teachers do not "seek to link their work to the dynamics of leadership" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001 p. 10). Some teachers focus more on subject matter specialization. Also, Katzenmeyer & Moller (p. 11) note that some teachers who "exert leadership at a certain juncture in their careers, or in a particular educational context, may choose not to do so at another time or in another context."

Another view of teacher leadership is that all teachers are leaders. Gardner (1990) says that, "Teaching and leading are indistinguishable occupations, every great leader is teaching and every great teacher is leading" (1990, p.18). This is known as the democratic view of teacher leadership whereby all teachers are leaders (Lieberman et al., 2000; Rost, 1981). Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) espouse that all teachers have leadership qualities both inside and outside the classroom. Students, parents, and colleagues often look to teachers for guidance and direction. "When teachers lead they help to create an environment for learning that influences the entire school community" (Lieberman & Miller, 2004, p. 91). Both Fullan (1994) and Lambert (2003) argue that teacher leadership is not an individual enterprise taking place haphazardly in isolation but rather an inclusive model of groups of teachers intentionally working together to transform the environments where they work and lead. This view of teacher leadership is contrary to most of the early research on the subject which has focused on individual teachers and the nature of leadership they have assumed (Smylie, 1995).

The current challenges of the high stakes testing movement and school reform are continuing to draw attention to the topic of teacher leadership in education. Misunderstandings about the definitions, however, are plentiful (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). "The literature on teacher leadership contains a bewildering array of definitions, theories, and models" (Harris, 2003 p. 318). The role of the teacher in the school reform movement continues to be questioned. Palmer (1998) stated, "In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, rewriting curricula, and revisiting texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher, on whom so much depends" (p.3). Teachers need to be a critical ingredient in the movement to reform schools. Their voices must be heard in the collaborative decision making process. If school reform is going to succeed school leaders must respond to the needs of our forever changing, information driven society by embracing new forms of leadership, particularly teacher leadership (Frost & Durrant, 2003).

2.3 Transformational Leadership

Leithwood & Jantzi (1999) and Barbuto (2005) cited the current high stakes testing movement as reasons for promoting transformational leadership in today's schools. Transformational leadership emphasizes new values and goals and nurtures students' personal capacities and abilities so that they can meet or even exceed these goals. Today's schools, often consumed with restructuring efforts to meet the demands of high stakes tests, are searching for leadership models. Transformational leadership has the capacity to inspire others using trust and commitment to work toward a common goal. Transformational leaders are team players who cultivate others personal capacities and

talents. Indeed, transformational leaders repeatedly foster positive attitudes and changes in their followers, which often result in their ability to accomplish or even surpass their goals (Barbuto, 2005; Feinberg, Ostroff, & Burke, 2005; Jung, & Avolio, 1999; Spreitzer, Perttula, & Xin, 2005). The work of Leithwood and others centered primarily on school administrators and school principals. There is, however, the potential value of using the identified characteristics of transformational leadership in the field of special education where the array of services must be flexible and responsive to the needs of students with disabilities.

Transformational leadership encourages both the leader and the follower to accept challenges and learn from their successes and failures. This holistic approach focuses on rational and emotional components of individual behavior and needs. Transformational leadership focuses on the interplay between the leader and the follower to reach the goals of the organization. Special education teachers encourage genuine interaction between students and teachers to reach both IEP goals and district goals for performance. This participatory approach allows teachers to monitor progress, provide feedback, and be more responsive to individual needs of every student with a disability. In addition, transformational leadership enables others to act which is a requirement of special education teachers. They collaborate with staff, students, professionals, and parents so that specific areas of expertise are shared to meet the needs of students. Increasingly viewed as a benchmark of teacher effectiveness in inclusive classrooms, is this goal of all teachers being effective in collaborating and instituting well-researched learning and teaching to differentiate classroom instruction (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, & Scheer, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Loreman, Deppeler,

& Harvey, 2005). The leader-follower dynamic is extremely important in transformational leadership models.

2.4 Transformational Leadership Model

In his Pulitzer Prize winning work *Leadership,* James MacGregor Burns (1978), espoused two specific types of leadership models, transactional leadership and transformational leadership. His models based on world and corporate leadership styles organized leaders into ordinary leadership "transactional" and extraordinary or "transformational" leadership. Transactional leadership seeks to maintain the status quo while transformational leadership focuses on change. In transactional leadership, there is an exchange relationship between the leader and follower including some type of extrinsic reward for follower compliance (hard work, productivity, reliability). Transactional leadership is concerned with the means while transformational leadership is focused on the ends.

Transactional leaders are often action-oriented and directive leaders that attempt to meet the organizational goals. Indeed, they often focus on basic needs such as safety and performance. Many of the special education teachers the researcher's daughter, Grace, had in school have been transactional in their approach, acting as micromanagers and using prewritten checklists of IEP goals and objectives to formulate academic strategies and materials. One teacher tried to refuse Grace's entry into her classroom because she had to wear a portable ambulatory EEG monitoring device to record seizure activity. This teacher claimed that this device was not indicated in the specialized materials section of Grace's IEP and she "didn't feel comfortable" having this exposed to the other children in the class. A special educator needs to be an effective transactional

leader by focusing on student task completion and acting as a compliance monitor of IEP goals and objectives. However, besides being effective classroom managers, these teachers must also lead by example and help foster a relationship of trust to help students feel accepted and capable which is a hallmark of transformational leadership (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leadership is more lasting and mutually supporting between the leader and the follower. According to Burns (1978), this relationship is reciprocal and elevates both the leader and follower to a higher level of motivation and morality. Burns' vision of transformational leadership combines Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs with Kohlberg's (1963) framework of moral development. In doing so, Burns demonstrates his conception of the reciprocal nature of leader and follower needs and morality in the exercise of transformational leadership and followership. Transformational leaders strive to reach the highest levels of morality and goodness such as esteem and self-actualization. Burns sees transformational leaders operating within the post conventional stage of morality. Conversely, transactional leaders are much more concrete in their thinking, focusing on basic needs and the stages of conformity, punishment, deference to authority, and social convention.

Transformational leaders motivate followers to go beyond their own immediate self-interest for the sake of the mission and good of the organization. They involve their followers in the decision-making process and talk with individuals, not about them. Indeed, they focus on end values such as liberty, equality, and justice. Followers' confidence levels are buoyed and their desires stretched by the leader taking into account their needs, wants, and motivations. This ultimately results in the followers striving

harder to meet expectations because the leader is cognizant of their (emotional, intellectual, and moral) desires (Bass 1985; Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders show genuine concern for their followers. When those elements of transformational leadership are applied to special education, teachers will show the highest level of respect for their students and assist their students in developing skills that empower them to become self-advocates.

Not only are transformational leaders concerned about the good of the organization, but according to Burns (1978), are also concerned about the good of their followers. They empower, cultivate, and seek to elevate the situation of their followers. In doing so, they attempt to instill pride, faith, and respect in their followers. They are willing to delegate projects in order to stimulate, create, and cultivate learning experiences and leadership skills in their followers (Bass & Aviolo, 1990). Researcher Bernard Bass expanded upon follower attributes in the 1980's.

In his seminal work, Bass (1985) looked at the transformational leadership by examining the impact it has on the followers. He coined the four "I's' that were characteristics of how a transformational leader inspires his/her followers. They are as follows:

1. Intellectual Stimulation – whereby the leader provides the vision for the followers that often challenge the status quo; they also encourage creativity among followers. The leader encourages followers to explore new ways of doing things and new opportunities to learn.

2. Individualized Consideration – whereby the leader gives personal attention and recognition to each follower. The leader coaches, advises, and communicates with followers to promote a free exchange of ideas and create problem solving.

3. Inspirational Motivation – whereby the leader communicates high expectations and uses symbols to focus the efforts of the organization and followers. The leader articulates a clear vision which results in enthusiasm and optimism and assists the followers in envisioning future possibilities.

4. Idealized Influence – whereby the leader provides the vision for the organization and followers and serves as a role model. The leader gains trust, respect, and confidence from the followers who emulate his/her ideals (Bass 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Based on the work of both Burns and Bass, transformational leaders are characterized as problem-solvers who rethink old patterns of behavior and encourage their followers to be creative thinkers who solve problems in unique and innovative ways. Indeed, they are change agents who are not used to living with the status quo (Bass, 1985). In their desire to advance intellectual stimulation these leaders tend to promote experimentation and creative thinking, and activate followers higher order needs. This is accomplished by having a clear sense of their goals so they can actively help their followers meet and often exceed these goals (Bass, 1985). Bass's studies of transformational leadership have taken place primarily in industrial settings and his Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), as well as Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), have been used and modified to analyze both transactional and transformational leadership propensities (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1995). Based on their years of research, Kouzes and Posner (2003) developed The Leadership Practices

Inventory (LPI), an instrument that measures transactional and transformational behaviors of practicing leaders. Their model espouses five best practices modeled by what they called transformational "exemplary leaders" (Kouzes & Posner, 2008, p. 3). A transformational leader would:

1. Challenge the process – Leaders seek and accept challenges. They are willing to take risks, innovate, experiment, and find better ways of doing things. They learn from their successes and failures and help others do the same.
2. Inspire a shared vision – Leaders believe that they can make a difference. They are able to look forward to a new reality and then share and inspire others to be a part of the vision because they know those who they serve and have their interests in mind.
3. Enable others to act – Leaders understand that others must act to reach their vision. They foster collaboration and make it possible for others to participate, share, and make a commitment to the vision. They foster a relationship of trust to help others feel accepted and capable.
4. Model the way – Leaders are the models that others look to for guidance. They understand that others look at their actions and behavior as a model of what needs to be done. They establish values and guiding principles about how others should be treated and unravel bureaucracy so that others can be successful.
5. Encourage the heart – Leaders celebrate accomplishments, recognize contributions, and are able to provide the incentives and rewards that encourage everyone to continue to strive towards the vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2008).

The Kouzes & Posner best practices model provides insight into what a transformational teacher leader in special education might represent. Building on Burns'

belief that transformational leaders are able to foster a "shared sense of destiny" (Kouzes & Posner, 2008, p. 163), the transformational teacher leader has to communicate the purpose and generate support for the new direction. The Kouzes & Posner model encompasses Burns' belief that transformational leadership is an ongoing process that encourages people to work collaboratively while elevating them to reach their maximum potential.

2.5 Transformational Leadership for Schools and Classrooms

By the 1990's the concepts of Burns and Bass were being applied to the field of public education administration. Kenneth Leithwood (1993) espoused the need for transformational leaders in educational administration given the current school reform movement. Leithwood identified six factors that comprise transformational leadership in school administration. These dimensions included identifying and articulating a vision, providing an appropriate model, fostering the acceptance of group goals, holding high performance expectations, proving individualized support, and providing intellectual stimulation (Leithwood, Tomlinson, & Genge, 1996 p. 11). Leithwood et al. (1996) articulated the view that principals and school administrators who focus on these areas were not only transformational leaders but also much more effective in their efforts for school reform.

Although Leithwood & Jantzi's work (1999) contributed to the field of transformational leadership by encouraging researchers to conduct over twenty studies related to teacher outcomes, the results have been mixed and there is no definitive model or widely accepted study that identifies a transformational leadership model in general education or special education. Treslan (2006) used Leithwood et al.'s 1996 model to

develop a list of six commonly understood values that are applicable to both school organizations and classroom settings. This list expands upon Leithwood's dimensions and shows how they would demonstrate transformational leadership in the classroom. They include: purpose, empowerment, power to accomplish, quality control, outrage, and moral action. Today's effective teachers have dispositions that value the nature of human differences and recognize the importance of being a first-rate educator for all students. Treslan's list is applicable to both general education and special education teachers because they all have a responsibility to teach all students regardless of their different challenges or special needs. These values represent transformational leadership in education in six possible ways.

First, purpose involves how the leader orchestrates clarity, consensus, and commitment to school goals. Teachers demonstrate this value when they make clear their lesson objectives, reply to class questions, and check for class understanding. This is a constructivist approach to teaching and leading whereby the teacher orchestrates the classroom to reflect higher order thinking and best pedagogical practices.

Second, empowerment involves a community approach to the classroom in which the leader (teacher) and followers (students) have a vested interest in the learning process. Students are given a voice in decision-making, especially in concerning classroom management issues. This results in positive student-teacher relations and a more harmonious classroom environment.

Third, power to accomplish involves providing a "can-do" attitude that encourages students to take risks and be successful in the classroom. This participatory approach helps students take ownership of their learning and make strides toward

mastering content. Classrooms become learning communities and teachers support students to achieve.

Fourth, quality control involves inspiring students for the greater good. Teachers combine their personal mission with the daily academic tasks in the classroom. This involves valuing rigor and inventiveness while practicing the art of teaching and envisioning of what each child can become.

Fifth, outrage is value based and teachers model and instill "honesty, integrity, responsibility, and concern for others" (Treslan, 2006, p. 60). Transformational teachers become upset when these values are violated by students or the school and take action to rectify injustices.

Sixth, moral action is the teacher's role of putting values into action and modeling and enforcing appropriate behaviors. What takes place in the classroom should mirror what is valued in society, "justice, community, freedom, and equality" (Treslan, p. 60). Transformational teachers should be stewards of a larger vision and practice what they preach when dealing with the real issues that face them in the classroom. This study researches and speaks to highlight an effective teacher who uses relationship building to help students develop positive, socially appropriate behaviors by focusing on what students do right. The collaborative strategies that the teacher employs will ultimately inspire their students to reach their social, behavioral, and academic goals. I will explore these areas in the study to see if the teacher in this study embodies any of those traits.

Studies concerning transformative teachers are virtually nonexistent. In 2008, a study was completed that utilized the Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) to measure the transformational leadership behaviors of practicing teachers. One of

the only studies to date to look at transformative teacher leaders, this study surveyed Connecticut teachers and their principals to answer the question of what are the leadership practices of teacher leaders. The study used the five criteria of modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart to rate leadership behaviors and activities (Alger, 2008).

The results of the study that used the LPI indicated that transformational teacher leaders scored extremely high on challenging the process and enabling others to act. Because of the current accountability movement, teacher leaders reported being actively involved in reform efforts to help their students succeed (Alger, 2008). In addition, these teachers were proactive in modeling changes that would help their colleague's better serve students. Although that study targeted general education teachers, it would certainly make sense to extend it to special education teachers who are using performance assessments to change their instructional practices while struggling to meet the unique educational needs of each student. It is apparent that special education is in need of effective teacher leaders who can help innovate instructional experiences to help all students with disabilities learn in varied ways in varied instructional settings.

2.6 Current Leadership Models

Burns is famous for taking the notion of leadership into the realm of the edification of leader and follower. The importance of this relationship continues to dominate current leadership models. This includes Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership approach (Greenleaf, 1977), the charismatic leadership approach (Conger, 1989), and the psychodynamic leadership approach whereby individuals have a certain pattern of thinking, feeling, acting (Northouse, 2007). All of these perspectives focus on the leader,

but also look at the relationship between the leader and follower: what each expects, what each needs, what each gives, and what each gains. Leithwood & Jantzi (2008) espouse that today's leaders must be self-aware and knowledgeable about how they can influence and motivate others to improve their thinking and teaching. For this researcher that requires tailor-teachers who can weave together a blueprint for success for each student and model best practices. Undoubtedly, this requires effective teachers who possess the qualities necessary to challenge people's assumptions, to collaborate, to negotiate compromises, to specify needed practices and strategies, and to attempt the unknown (Sizer, 1991).

2.7 Qualities of Effective Teachers

Changing legal requirements and rising standards as a result of high stakes testing are redefining the roles and responsibilities of today's teachers. In 1990 Barth defined a good school as a place where everyone is learning and teaching and where everyone receives the supports necessary to develop. One component of Barth's definition of a good school is that teachers hold high expectations for all students. The rallying cry in today's schools seems to be "higher expectations for all students." This call for greater accountability for student progress was heightened by passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB requires that teachers be highly qualified and fully certified in the area he or she is teaching. NCLB and prevailing legislation and litigation ensuring that all students (including low-income, minority, and students with disabilities) are receiving equal educational opportunity, are focusing interest in teacher quality and effectiveness.

Defining teacher quality and effectiveness is not an easy undertaking. The terminology has become so ubiquitous that it has lost any clear meaning (Kennedy, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001). Depending on their perspective, individuals using the term teacher effectiveness may be referring to classroom practices, teaching methods, values and beliefs toward student learning, teacher decision making, student achievement, and interaction of pedagogical and subject matter knowledge (Lederman & Niess, 2001). Many researchers and school administrators espouse that teacher effectiveness is best determined by teachers' contributions to student learning. Darling-Hammond (2000) proposes that teacher effectiveness is one of the most critical factors in determining the success of student achievement. In addition, students who are assigned to ineffective teachers have significantly lower achievement and learning than those who are assigned to highly effective teachers (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Current accountability policies are requiring teachers to possess the knowledge and skills that are necessary to assess student progress and increase student individual strengths and potential. Without question this requires effective educators who are able to use a variety of teaching strategies to ensure student success.

What is of interest for the purposes of this study is not the many approaches through which teacher effectiveness has been defined in the scholarly literature. Rather, this study relies on Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman's (2007) definitions and extensive research on the four primary dimensions of teacher effectiveness. These aspects include: instruction, student assessment, learning environment, and personal teacher qualities (2007, p. 168). These four categories help to establish a teaching environment whereby all students can achieve academically, socially, and emotionally. In Stronge's

book the Qualities of Effective Teachers (2007) he expands on the necessary qualities for teacher effectiveness by examining the literature in relation to the teacher as a person, the teacher as classroom manager and organizer, the teacher as an effective instructor, and the teacher as a monitor of student progress and potential.

2.8 Teacher as a Person

Teacher of the year, Guy Doud, once said, "If my students don't think I care about them, I'm not going to be successful with the academics" (Doud, 1986, p.2). If students are going to learn they need to feel at ease in their educational environment. The personal connection that teachers make with students helps in creating trusting and considerate relationships (Marzano, Pickering, & McTighe, 1993; Corbett and Wilson, 2002). Stronge notes that effective teachers have been assigned personal attributes such as caring, motivated, enthusiastic, respectful, and self-reflective (Stronge, 2007; Black & Howard-Jones, 2000; Peart & Campbell, 1999). Effective teachers "care for students first, as people, and second as students" (Stronge, 2007, p. 24). Knowing your students means knowing their strengths and weaknesses, personal learning styles, likes and dislikes, and personal circumstances that may influence and affect their learning and behavior (Peart & Campbell, 1991; Walsh & Sattes, 2005). In special education, this personal connection is critical because teachers must complete functional assessments to address adaptive behaviors, daily routines, and transitional planning. This requires gaining insight into each student to facilitate a quality of life for a student that is understood in the context of the community in which they live.

2.9 Teachers as Classroom Manager and Organizer

"As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a student humanized or de-humanized" (Ginott, 1972. p. 92). Ginott's quote draws attention to the need for teachers to be proficient classroom mangers. Effective teachers are skilled at establishing and sustaining safe, orderly, and industrious classroom environments. Stronge notes that effective teachers plan and prepare for organization of the classroom "with the same care and precision used to design a high-quality lesson" (Stronge, 2007. p. 39). These teachers develop a proactive classroom environment by working with students to make certain that routines, procedures, and expectations are clearly defined and implemented and enable students to be successful in meeting those expectations (Johnson, 1997; Pressley, Raphael, Gallagher, & DiBella 2004: Hoy & Hoy, 2003).

Discipline procedures and routines are well established and these teachers have excellent classroom management skills whereby they can keep students on task even when instructional time is lost or interrupted because of administrative activities, disciplinary issues, and transitions (Hoy & Hoy, 2003). In special education, effective teachers must be effective managers with effective classroom management skills. It is important for special education teachers to understand each student as an individual and assign meaning to each student's function of behavior. This affords teachers the opportunity to structure the environment to provide students with functionally equivalent

skills to meet their needs and provide positive behavioral support practices which prevent inappropriate behaviors.

2.10 Teacher as an Effective Instructor

A Japanese proverb says that, "Better than a thousand days of diligent study is one day with a great teacher" (Anonymous, n.d.). Without question, effective teachers realize that offering students the best education possible is the primary responsibility of every teacher. Stronge (2007) uses studies on high quality instruction to reach the following conclusions regarding the importance of effective teaching:

- Effective teachers are consistent and organized and concentrate most of their efforts on teaching and learning (Bain & Jacobs, 1990).
- Effective teachers pay careful attention to academic goals that reflect benchmarks or standards (Cawelti, 2004) and also address personal skills and social goals (Zahorik, Halbach, Ehrle, & Molnar, 2003).
- Effective teachers model the importance of instruction and learning and communicate that enthusiasm to their students (Bain & Jacobs, 1990).
- Effective teachers allocate time, resources, and a variety of instructional strategies to facilitate learning and convey expectations to students (Brophy & Good, 1986; Cotton, 2000, Covino & Iwanicki, 1996; Molnar, 1999).
- Effective teachers provide active instruction where students are engaged in constructivist and hands-on learning while being supported by the teacher (Cunningham & Allington, 1999; Good & Brophy, 1997; Shellard & Protheroe, 2000; Wahlberg, 1994). Effective teachers can also vary instructional techniques and employ mastery learning and cooperative learning in their classes. In addition, effective teachers use technology

during instruction and use students' prior knowledge as a starting point to gauge their lessons and instruction (Dickson & Irving, 2002). These educators also use student inquiry and student curiosity to ask questions and teach students how to ask their own higher order questions to make connections and find meaning in the material (Covino & Iwanicki, 1996). Varying instructional techniques is a vital component of special education.

The law now mandates that students with disabilities receive research-validated practices that are effective for each learner. Effective teachers must now be successful with the use of intervention models designed to help these students structure and mediate their own learning within the general educations classrooms (Vaughn & Klinger, 1998). Universal design for learning and the development of intervention technologies, along with the provision for assistive devices, enables teachers to differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities (Rusch, Hughes, McNair & Wilson, 1989). Effective teachers not only plan for effective instruction for all of their students, but also develop evaluation structures that enhance individual strengths and potential.

2.11 Teacher as Monitor of Student Progress and Potential

Ted Sizer's quote that, "Knowing how students are doing is necessary equipment for the teacher and the parent as well" highlights the importance of an effective teacher knowing how to monitor student learning through both formal and informal assessment procedures (Cotton, 2000; Peart & Campbell, 1999). The analysis of student performance educates teachers about how well students have acquired specific understandings and skills, and guides them in setting instructional goals (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001;

Gronlund, 2003). Effective teachers analyze student progress and provide appropriate feedback so that students can improve and be more successful in future work and with high stakes testing (Hoy & Hoy, 2003). This is important with a current focus on student achievement as the primary measure of school and student success.

Students with disabilities are also feeling the pressure(s) of an emphasis on challenging academic standards that specify the knowledge and skills students should acquire and the levels at which they should demonstrate mastery of that knowledge. With the mandate for students with disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment with their non-disabled peers comes the expectation that they meet the same standards and take the same state mandated achievement tests. This means that information about what these students can do is essential for designing meaningful and comprehensive educational programs to help them be successful.

2.12 Special Education, IDEA, Accountability Requirements

Special education, since its beginning, has undergone tremendous change; however, the accountability movement is once again reshaping the field. Past practices of providing students with disabilities limited or basic services based on their IQ or achievement scores are no longer acceptable. Students, regardless of their ability levels, are entitled to an academic curriculum that is rich and stimulating and appropriate to their individual needs. Effective special education teachers understand the need to measure student achievement yet, at the same time, employ strategies that are fair, meaningful, and useful to meet students' unique needs. Students with disabilities must never again be segregated and made to feel inferior because of their score on a standardized test.

The movement to assess and hold schools accountable for the educational performance of students with disabilities is fairly new in the United States. Since the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975, states have been directed to provide a free and appropriate education for all students with disabilities (Gallagher, 2000; Rothstein, 1995). The law marked a departure from the general federal role in education in that it was highly directive to states and to the schools. P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), was designed to address the needs of more than eight million children with a "handicap" in the United States by mandating state and local districts to establish formal procedures to identify these students.

Each child with a disability was to be given an Individualized Education Program (IEP) specifying the type and scope of special education program that was to be provided. In establishing IEP's, the federal government was holding states and local districts accountable by setting up due process procedures to protect each student's rights. Additionally, to qualify for federal funds, states had to have procedures in place to ensure that students with a "handicap" were educated with students without a "handicap" in the least restrictive environment (Gallagher, 2000; Rothstein, 1995). P.L. 94-142 held states accountable for educating all students with disabilities.

P.L. 94-142 has gone through several iterations since its initial passage. These changes clarify the law and mandate that schools use evidence-based practices to educate students with disabilities. In 1990, P.L. 94-142 came to be known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), replacing "children" with "individuals" and "handicapped" with "disabilities," IDEA-1990 also mandates that school districts

provide an individual transition plan (ITP) as part of each student's IEP. This plan holds schools accountable for providing a coordinated set of activities to promote the student's movement to post-school functions such as independent living, vocational training, and additional educational experiences (wrightslaw.com, 2008). Transition planning as mandated by IDEA continues to be an important component of each student's IEP. Therefore, an effective special education teacher helps students prepare for life after school by developing their interests, abilities, and aptitudes. This involves envisioning the possibilities and lighting the fire under students to realize and develop their strengths, talents, and passions.

The IDEA Act Amendments of 1997 required schools to establish performance goals for students with disabilities in an effort to assess their academic performance (wrightslaw.com, 2008). Additionally, the students were also to be included in statewide and district wide assessment programs to measure their academic performance. If the IEP team deemed that a student's disability prevented him/her from taking the required assessment, the student could opt out of the test or be given alternative assessments to meet their unique needs. IDEA-2004 tightened the exemptions and set "high expectations" for students with disabilities (wrightslaw.com, 2008).

IDEA 2004 specifies that the education of children with disabilities can be more effective by ensuring their maximum access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom. This means providing students with a curriculum and highly qualified professionals that can, to the greatest extent possible, provide them with the challenging academic expectations established for all children (National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2005). One of the major reforms of IDEA 2004 was requiring that all students

with disabilities take part in state assessments with appropriate accommodations when necessary. This was a change in expectations for students with disabilities and one that was not without controversy, particularly in light of the increasing pressure schools were facing with regard to high stakes accountability testing as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

NCLB legislation strengthened the accountability requirements of the 1994 reauthorization of Improving Americans Schools Act (IASA) by requiring all states to implement accountability systems that pertain to all public schools and their students (Herman & Haertel, 2005; Matthews, 2003). Furthermore, it mandated that students in grades three through eight be tested yearly on "challenging academic content standards" and that all students must reach proficiency in all subjects by the year 2014. Accordingly, based on the test scores, each state, school district, and school is expected to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward meeting state standards (Herman & Haertel, 2005; Matthews, 2003). Today, the overwhelming majority of students with disabilities participate in accountability testing right alongside every other student.

NCLB (2001) has increased the demand on school districts to close achievement gaps and to provide access to a high-quality education for every child. Subsequently, both general educators and special educators are feeling the pressure(s) to prepare students for the high stakes achievement tests. Special educators are feeling additional pressure since many of their students do not meet the proficiency levels that are required by NCLB mandates (Russell & McCombs, 2006). Low scores by the special education population can impact adequate yearly progress (AYP) measures, and that may target districts for corrective action by the Department of Education. Therefore, special education teachers

experience continual pressure to ensure that their special education students earn passing scores on the state-mandated achievement tests. This pressure adjoins with the demands placed on special educators to provide accommodations for students with disabilities that maximize the student's ability to succeed in the least restrictive learning environment. Unfortunately, these stressors can result in grave consequences for both teacher morale and student performance (Russell & McCombs, 2006). An effective special education teacher can keep abreast of new resources, instructional techniques, and collaborate with colleagues to make good things happen for their students regardless of the high stakes testing environment that permeates school climates.

With IDEA, a fundamental principle of special education is individualization. This means tailoring instruction and assessment to meet the individual academic, behavioral, and social needs of each student. This requires competent and knowledgeable special education teachers. The current standards-based testing and curriculum development model uses uniform technology that all too often fails to account for individual needs (Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). Without access to necessary accommodations or alternate forms of assessment, students with disabilities are expected to achieve at the same proficiency rate as peers without disabilities. To be successful students with IEP's need teachers who can account for learning styles, vary assessment procedures, and motivate students to succeed (Nevin, 1998; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007). This requires competent teachers who are willing and able to battle for performance standards and objectives that are broad enough to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities.

Furthermore, providing appropriate and individualized instruction necessitates the need to have effective teacher leaders who can use the results of assessments and state-mandated tests to improve student learning by using differentiated instruction to facilitate content learning for every student with a disability (Treslan, 2006: McLaughlin & Verstegen, 1998; Elliott & Thurlow, 2000). That means teaching students according to their individual needs and utilizing technology to help them achieve their individual potential. Finally, it means inspiring students with trusting relationships and teacher-directed approaches toward learning.

Students with disabilities are often not active, self-regulated learners and need extensive structure and explicit instruction to develop understanding (Carnine, 2000; Peterson & Hittie, 2003). A committed and competent teacher can create this supportive and caring environment to help students with academic skills, social skills, behavioral skills, functional skills, and independent living skills. This requires transformational leadership that is flexible and creative on the part of the special education teacher who values a comprehensive approach when working with students with IEP's to keep students feeling valued, connected, and on track to graduation and beyond. This study will seek to show an effective teacher who demonstrates the characteristics of an inspirational leader in the field of special education as defined by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), and has been able to consistently and efficiently work with students who have disabilities.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

"More than education, more than experience, more than training, a person's level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails" (Coutu, 2002, P. 48).

3.1 Portraiture

This is portraiture of a resilient and effective special education teacher. This story of a resilient and effective special education teacher begins in 1977 when Jimmy Carter was in the White House. Softly and slowly the winds of change were beginning to blow into dark and segregated classrooms for students with disabilities across the American landscape. On November 29, 1975, President Ford added his signature to a sweeping piece of education legislation in the Oval Office. Public Law 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act that took effect in 1977. Prior to this signing, the road toward the schoolhouse door was extremely treacherous and all too often filled with roadblocks for students with disabilities. In fact, Congressional records estimate that in 1975 there were eight million students in the United States with known disabilities (Terman, Larner, Stevenson & Behrman, 1996). Three million of these students were receiving an education in a public school, four million were receiving some sort of training that was typically segregated, inappropriate, and often cost prohibitive to parents, and one million students were excluded entirely from any type of public education (Gallagher, 2000; Rothstein, 1995). The phrase, handicapped accessible, was an oxymoron and the highways, byways, and country roads remained impassible for many children with disabilities until 1977.

For the first time in the history of public education in America, P.L. 94-142 guaranteed students with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (Gallagher, 2000; Rothstein, 1995). States endeavored to interpret the new law while public school districts began the arduous process of removing roadblocks and barriers that prohibited students with disabling conditions from being educated. Eyes turned toward special education teachers, few in number, who now had the responsibility of writing Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) for each student and designing individualized instruction to meet varied students' needs.

One wide-eyed teacher began her teaching career amidst this backdrop. In 1977, with her new degree entitled, "Education of the Mentally Retarded" in hand, she began her teaching career that has now spanned over three decades. Her progression from being a novice teacher and encountering her first special education classroom, to becoming a veteran lead teacher who has transformed the lives of countless students, is a compelling story that gives unique insight into the history, challenges, and changes in the field of special education. In order to capture the very essence of a subject, Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis (1997, p. 11) highlighted the importance of creating a qualitative narrative that is, "complex, provocative, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history" of the participant. Indeed, portraiture is the best way to document human behavior and experience in content. The teacher in this case study is tailor–made for this type of a qualitative narrative.

This teacher was there in the beginning when the winds of change began to blow into dark and segregated classrooms. This teacher's personal portrait provides a beautiful

quilt of an effective and inspiring teacher in the field of special education. Quilts provide comfort from the storms of life and warm a child who was once abandoned and segregated along a dark and cold road. Her quilt shows the whole picture of her teaching experiences in the field of special education, but each patch exemplifies the uniqueness of each child on this educator's quilt rack.

Discovering, exploring, and sharing the career of this successful teacher enables others to see beyond historical accounts, results of research, and information found in traditional textbooks and quantitative studies. We can actually step back into secluded special education classrooms and programs that were prevalent in the 1970's and 1980's. We can answer the question; what was it like to teach back then? Through her eyes, experiences, and memories, we can intimately see and more fully understand the learning environment of those students and those early special education teachers. Then, we will fully grasp the challenges this special education teacher faced as she shares her feelings of frustration and her successes.

Tracing her experiences enabled me, the researcher, to do more than learn about the Regular Education Initiative that was a precursor to "inclusion," study the changes to P.L. 94-142, and look at the impact of the No Child Left behind Act (2001). She provides unique, personal perspectives from inside many classrooms to distinguish how special education teachers have been required to alter their methods, programs, practices, and curriculums over the years. She shared, explored, and analyzed the norms, patterns, and complexities of her journey as a special educator. She discussed her vision to inspire students to set and reach individual goals. She also divulged how she collaborates and inspires other professionals to do the same. Ultimately, she described how the current

high stakes testing, data-driven, decision-making assessment model that schools are currently using to determine the proficiency of their students is affecting students with disabilities.

As an effective tailor-teacher, she discussed the strategies and best practices she uses to encourage "the heart" and make every effort to meet the social, behavioral, and transitional needs of students like Grace even with the demands of the current standards-driven educational environment. Through her experiences, we, as teachers of special education, can perhaps create our own quilt as we learn how to utilize individualized, referenced decision-making, and continually plan and adjust curriculum and strategies to educate and reassure our students amidst the storms and challenges of life.

3.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this single person study is to provide an answer to the following questions:

1. What characteristics of leadership have been shown to be successful when meeting the needs of students with disabilities?
2. How are the current challenges of incorporating high stakes testing affecting the curriculum along with individual lesson plans and Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities?
3. How are those challenges being successfully addressed by a veteran special education teacher who is considered to be a leader in the field?
4. What does it mean to be an effective teacher in the field of special education in the current educational climate?

3.3 Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study examines an exemplary special education teacher who, by her commitment, passion, instruction, and consistency of beliefs, emulates an effective teacher leader in the field of special education. Knowing what constitutes an effective special education teacher will make a difference in how people think about providing services to students with disabilities. Finding a special education teacher that is meeting the needs of her students will make a difference in the lives of students, teachers, and parents of children with disabilities. Therein lies the purpose of this study; to use the art and science of portraiture and illuminate a charismatic and effective teacher in the field of special education. Within this context, the researcher studied how this teacher is a leader in the field of special education by keeping the "special" in special education and inspiring others to do the same.

The cornerstone of special education has always been to provide specialized instruction to meet the unique needs of each child with a disability. Special educators are expected to utilize individualized referenced decision-making and continually plan and adjust curriculum and strategies to educate and motivate their students. Unfortunately, given the current educational climate that is focused on standards, student achievement, and school accountability, many of today's special education teachers have taken the "special" out of special education and are employing a general education utilitarian approach to service their students with disabilities (Hardman & Dawson, 2008).

Designed as a qualitative single person case study of one individual who has a long history of inspiring her special education students to succeed within the ongoing climate of changes in the field of special education, the researcher will create a portrait of

an effective teacher who inspires her students to succeed. This study explores how the teacher approaches the ecology of the child and navigates the inherent challenges of providing appropriately targeted and holistic educational opportunities to students with disabilities in a current educational climate driven by high-stakes testing.

The researcher investigated the teacher through a series of planned and spontaneous questions in the natural setting of the teacher's classroom. Through the interviews, the researcher discovered the ways she demonstrates leadership by consistently meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of her students with disabilities. The study includes the collaborative, problem-solving, and innovative strategies she uses as an effective teacher that address the unique needs of students and satisfies the anxieties of parents. The researcher agreed with Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) about the importance of emotional intelligence to improve teaching and learning. Emotional intelligence was a criterion for investigating the experiences, strategies, and characteristics of this particular special education teacher. Ultimately, the researcher determined how this intuitive, committed, caring, and competent teacher in the field of special education weaves together a tapestry of opportunity and success that encourages her students to explore new ways of doing things while continually providing them with new opportunities to learn and grow.

3.4 Research Design and Procedures

Shank (2002 p. 11) states, "That the central focus of qualitative research is to provide "insight, enlightenment, and illumination" into a complex situation." To accomplish those goals, at each meeting, the researcher asked the teacher a series of designed questions that address a specific research question along with spontaneous

questions that were generated during the conversations. In this way, the researcher entered the informant's world and, through multiple interviews, discovered her insights, perspectives, and broad range of supports she uses to address the individual needs of her students (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

As a single-person study, the process was designed as a series of four planned interviews conducted in the natural setting of the teacher's classroom. Using an audio tape recorder, writing tablets, writing pens, and pencils, the researcher designed each interview following a designed plan of questions that addressed a specific research question as well as information gleaned from previous interviews. In this way, the questions and responses informed and enlightened the researcher by answering the predetermined research questions. The interviews were audio taped and the researcher conducted a content analysis of all recorded interviews.

3.5 Research Method

The method for this study is social science portraiture whose genre of inquiry and illustration seeks to join science and art.

> Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions-their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through the dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image. The relationship between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and becomes the arena for navigating the empirical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of authentic and compelling narrative. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis (1997 p. xv).

The principles embodied in the above quotation espouse the aspirations for my research; communicating the intricacies of experience, giving voice to this practitioner in

the field of special education, and constructing meanings of what it means to be an effective teacher-leader in the field of special education. Featherstone (1989) says that this type of rich storytelling moves serious study to the "frontiers of art" (p.367). He notes that portraiture is an interventionist approach to research because "we enter people's lives, build relationships, engage in discourse, make an imprint, and leave" (1989, p. 377). As the portraitist in this study, it is my earnest hope that my research deepens the conversation about effective teachers and gives birth to practices that enrich the lives of students with disabilities.

3.6 Sample Selection and Size & Recruitment of Subjects

The study is a population of one teacher in the field of Special Education who the researcher approached to participate in the study only after receiving IRB approval. There was no other contact with school personnel, students, parents, or any other person. The teacher was identified from discussions I had with district teachers and students in my current role as an assistant education professor at a university. My university students engage in field work and time and again after reading their anecdotal records I noticed one teacher was referenced as an "extraordinary" teacher. This teacher was given the highest rating by my university students as a special education teacher who inspires all of her students to excel. Additionally, from my work in the field and as a parent of a child with disabilities, I was acutely aware of the need for effective teachers in the field of special education and thrilled at the prospect of learning about the possibility of one.

3.7 Informed Consent Procedures and Issues Relating to Interactions with Subjects

This study was conducted in accordance with Duquesne University research protocols in recognition that learners acting as researchers are faced with ethical concerns. The researcher obtained an informed consent from the participant. Elements of this informed consent included the following: notifying the participant who is the subject of the study, establishing the time commitment required, explaining the study in easily understandable language, offering to answer any questions, informing the participant that her involvement is voluntary, informing the participant that she can withdraw at any time, letting the participant know the limits of confidentiality, and ensuring that the participant emerges from the research unharmed. The subject signed a consent form showing her understanding of the study, purpose, and methods before the research began.

3.8 Collection of Data and Method of Data Analysis

To achieve a careful analysis of each interview, the researcher audio taped each session. By following the models of other researchers who have successfully conducted similar studies, the researcher transcribed and coded the data of each interview. The researcher looked for patterns in the conversations that provide evidence of the teacher exhibiting the characteristics of effective leadership in the field of special education. The researcher periodically verified what had been analyzed with the participant to ensure accuracy of her statements and the data. The researcher used what Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis (1997) calls an "impressionistic record" (p. 188). Using a notebook, the researcher collected, classified, analyzed, and studied the data after each interview to find

meaning, look for hypotheses, and suggest emergent themes and patterns regarding effective practices, and developed additional questions for each subsequent visit.

The first interview focused on the researcher gaining background information, biographical information, and having the teacher articulate her vision as a special education teacher. The second interview addressed the first research question: "What characteristics of leadership have been shown to be successful when meeting the needs of students with disabilities?" The researcher sought specific examples of the teacher's work, as well as anecdotal samples of her experiences.

The third interview focused on the second and third research questions: "How are the current challenges of incorporating high stakes testing affecting the curriculum along with individual lesson plans and Individualized Education Programs for students with disabilities?" and "How are those challenges being successfully addressed by a veteran special education teacher who is considered to be a leader in the field?" The researcher expanded on information brought up during the second interview. During this interview, the researcher also established how this teacher holds high expectations for all students and prepares them to meet these challenges given their diverse needs.

The fourth and final interview focused on the fourth research question: "What does it mean to be an effective teacher in the field of special education in the current educational climate?" Along with information from past interviews, this interview looked for patterns in how this teacher focuses on the gestalt of each student and helps transition them from school to community life.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESULTS-ILLUMINATION

4.1 Rationale

"I like to know what happens to those warm, cuddly, little kids when they grow up." This quote by the teacher in this study, known as Catherine (not her real name), lifts the curtain off her soul as teacher. Who is Catherine? Catherine is a short, athletic, energetic woman with a forceful personality that loves teaching high school students with disabilities.

Portraitist researchers find meaning in the context of their subject. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis (1997, p.41) defines context as the setting where the action takes place. The setting for this study was Catherine's educational realm at the high school. This realm encompasses not only the building and her physical classroom but also the "temporal, historical, cultural, and aesthetic framework" (p. 43) where she practices her art of teaching. According to Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman (2007) this equates to the four dimensions of teacher effectiveness: instruction, student assessment, learning environment, and personal qualities. The portraitist researcher is the "stranger" in the environment of the subject. In qualitative inquiry it is critical for the researcher to begin working in context by being a participant observer in the organizational culture of their subject to better understand the reality they are observing. For that reason, my first visit to the natural environment of the teacher took an entire school day. I wanted to witness what was happening to this teacher by understanding her angle of vision. With notebook in hand, I arrived at the high school at 7:00 a.m. ready to shadow, watch, and interpret the

actions, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of the high school special education teacher known as Catherine.

Watching her interact with her students is like watching the rhythmic flow of an extraordinary concert musician producing a plethora of harmonious melodies with seemingly effortless ability. The faces of her classroom are as varied as her approaches of encouragement between herself and her students. Using no notes, she purposefully travels about her classroom with a style that is uniquely her own. The synchronization of educational tasks between the teacher and the students is pure artistry. Each student is being taught to his or her individual needs. The student with the neurological disorder gets explicit directions that address his needs. The student with selective mutism effectively communicates with the teacher using non-verbal techniques. The student with a language disability uses assistive technology to complete his assignments. Catherine, using pauses, inflection, and tone that is rich in evocative emotion, works with a class that seems to be amenable, respective, and highly productive. Who is Catherine? Catherine is a motherly figure that runs her classes with the precision and organization of a fine tuned drill sergeant.

Catherine is not unlike one of the earliest special educators Anne Sullivan Macy. Sullivan Macy believed that, "A strenuous effort must be made to train young people to think for themselves and take independent charge of their lives" (Sullivan Macy, 1932). Sullivan Macy's seminal work with Helen Keller educated the field about the importance of individualized instruction. While working with Keller, Sullivan Macy experimented with a variety of intervention strategies to help her student become an autonomous and productive young adult (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach & Richardson, 2005).

Catherine, too, believes that it is her charge to help her students develop into healthy and productive young adults. "I believe in student-centered planning to help all of my students become responsible adults."

4.2 Teacher Background

"Amazing, vivacious, omniscient, and spontaneous" were interspersed throughout my observational notes after spending a day shadowing Catherine. The opportunity to spend a day understanding the contextual structures and range of experiences through the eyes and ears of Catherine proved to be invaluable in helping to frame and fine tune my research questions. I was excited to begin the interview process and learn more from this dynamic and creative educator. Stronge (2007) stresses the importance of teacher qualities like caring, fairness and respect, interactions with students, enthusiasm and motivation, attitude toward teaching, and reflective practice for effective teachers. Based on one day of observations, I'd say this teacher exhibits all of these qualities and many more. Our first formal interview took place several days later and focused on Catherine's personal context (background and biographical information) and historical context (ideological journey) as a special education teacher.

4.3 Interview One

The journey back to the high school ends on a very busy highway. The high school, a red brick two story building, sits a few hundred feet from the local interstate. Its red bricks and steeple glimmer in the sunshine as I listen to the cacophony of high school students haphazardly exiting from the front glass doors on this brisk day in late winter. While I wait for the mass departure of the students my attention is drawn to the enormous windows that adorn the front of the building. During my last visit I was keenly

aware of the enormity of these windows as an insider in Catherine's classroom. Each classroom has at least one of these colossal windows separated into four distinct panes which seem to be a magnet for the late afternoon rays of sunshine. I smile as the sun warms my face on this frosty day. How ironic that the reality of this moment is that I am eager to enter this institute of learning while the students for whom this building was designed, are fleeing like rats from a burning ship. While one of the triple glass doors remains open I make my way past a student who is wearing a fleece jacket and a Pittsburgh Steelers' black and gold knit cap with a black tassel.

Inside the building I make my way straight ahead to the main office marked by a red sign that reads "All Visitors Must Sign in at Office." Catherine is waiting for me in front of the office and talking with a young colleague in his twenties. She greets me warmly and introduces me to this youthful, well dressed social studies teacher. Since it is now after school hours I needn't sign in and Catherine and I make our way to her second floor classroom located across from the library. Catherine has a very spacious classroom with two windows, traditional desks, tables, book shelves, computers, and a smart board. The classroom is bright, welcoming, organized, and uncluttered. Catherine suggests that we sit at a table where I can plug in my tape recorder and spread out my materials. To drown out any lingering noise and chaos from the after school confusion, Catherine closes the door and asks if I need anything. Her inquisitive look is indicative of our impending journey of discovery. Within a few minutes the hubbub of the school day is forgotten as we become engrossed in our conversation.

4.4 Formative Years

Catherine grew up the youngest of four children. Her mother was a teacher and instilled a love of learning in all of her children. Even as a child Catherine had a fervent zeal for teaching. “My mother always hoped that I would become a French teacher.” Catherine had a real love and propensity for French language and culture but was drawn to another field as an elementary student. In second grade Catherine volunteered to be a teacher’s helper in a classroom across the hall. This classroom was a class for students diagnosed with “mental retardation.” “I absolutely loved working in this room and helping these students.” Much to the surprise and chagrin of her mother and father, she proclaimed to all those around her that she had found her calling. “I am going to be a special education teacher.” Her mother hoped this early proclivity to teach special education would pass and that Catherine would ultimately become a French teacher. No one, however, could dissuade her from her aspiration to work with students with disabilities, and in 1973 she enrolled in a state university to fulfill her desire. Her college-related experiences only strengthened her resolve to work with individuals with disabilities.

4.5 College Years

In college Catherine volunteered at various community agencies and educational settings to work with individuals with disabilities. “One of my earliest placements was at a Cerebral Palsy Clinic working with babies and infants with developmental disabilities.” This experience helped to teach her a great deal about the impact of neurological impairments on infants and children especially related to their learning capacity and difficulty with self-expression. In addition to this clinic, Catherine worked as a volunteer

at a sheltered workshop where she helped individuals develop their swimming and coordination skills. Her educational program required her to direct activities in local elementary schools and she used these experiences to teach practical skills while differentiating tasks based on the varied learning needs of her students.

Following her freshman year, Catherine was hired for the summer to be a creative math helper for a Title I program that served students from low income families. “I knew how important it was to use kinesthetic and authentic instruction to help these students grasp math.” Her students used both mathematic manipulatives and community-based experiences to develop their mathematical skills. Catherine beamed as she uttered that one of her biggest thrills was to hear a young man say, “Hey look, there is the Lincoln Memorial.” He recognized the Lincoln Memorial on one of their enrichment field trips because he had built it to scale for one of her math lessons. Being a Title I helper proved to be an extremely valuable experience in preparing Catherine for her student teaching.

She was so successful in her summer position in 1974 that she was hired again in the summers of 1975 and 1976 to continue her work with Title I students. ‘These summer work experiences taught me that students possess varying degrees of skill development.” To be successful, Catherine “appreciated the uniqueness and diversity” of each child and was continually looking for creative ways to enrich their mind and spirit. In 1977 she was placed as a student teacher at an elementary school for exceptional children. Most of the students had been diagnosed with Down syndrome and her skill at differentiating instruction was put to use. Back then her students did not have IEPs and they had no specialized materials for instruction. “We used elementary school materials and had to adjust them to meet the needs of our students.” She used a lot of direct instruction and

drill and practice to make the curriculum meaningful to her students. The students were also taught functional, social, interpersonal, and vocational skills to help support them in their future.

Upon completion of her first student teaching experience, Catherine was placed in a high school setting to work with older students with developmental and learning disabilities. This placement gave her practice assessing students' skills, interests, desires, and goals to adequately place them and supervise them in a cooperative educational program. "As a student teacher, I had the opportunity to participate in school-based job training with my students." These cooperative experiences helped to strengthen her idea that special education teachers have a responsibility in developing and maintaining job skills for their students. These skills are essential to prepare them for future career options. Her work with cooperative education that placed students for part of the day in actual supported employment, proved to be helpful in obtaining her first position as a special education teacher.

4.6 First Teaching Position

In the summer of 1977, Catherine accepted her first position as a special education teacher. "I found it ironic, considering my petite stature, that I was continually interviewed for teaching positions working with secondary students." Her work in school-based job training programming with practical application was no doubt appealing to school districts who sought her skills for their secondary students. Pausing a moment Catherine said, "It must have been something about me…I thought well, maybe, I'll teach these older students for a year or two…here I am thirty-some years later." She said that

she has no regrets whatsoever. “I really like to know both the product and the end result. It is so rewarding for me to see my students graduate.”

“I was very busy my first year as a teacher.” She was both the new special education teacher as well as the new high school cheerleader advisor. Her first year was consumed with a great deal of planning for the classroom and the football sidelines. “I wanted all of my students to be successful in transitioning from school to life.” Her students were in grades 9-12 and Catherine was responsible for writing and implementing a curriculum that addressed their needs and lifestyles both inside and outside the classroom. She developed and taught a very practical curriculum. The early curriculum focused on job skills, social skills, personal adult life skills, and practical math and English skills.

“I knew that to be successful my students had to be able to: have good hygiene, look people in the eye when they spoke to them, be able to express themselves orally and in writing, and have functional mathematical and computational skills.” Her early curriculum focused on these skills and school-based job training. Catherine reached out to local businesses to place her students in supportive employment and work environments. “I developed a work study program that provided our students the opportunity to work on and off campus.” Some of the students worked in the school cafeteria, with the high school maintenance department, at local businesses, and at senior centers. “Even in those early years I knew how important it was to give students choices to develop their educational and career paths.” Catherine ran the work experience for all of her students.

Preparing students for their future was an important part of Catherine's early curriculum. Connections were made to her class and community and Catherine taught her students how to deal with issues and report problems that would arise at work. "In these early years, we obtained a special license from the state that allowed our students to be paid a sub-minimum wage." These were the days prior to support agencies completing community-based assessments for students. Based on individual student interests and needs, Catherine developed individual programs and reports for each one of her students. "When it was appropriate, some of the students earned credits rather than pay for their work experience." Catherine's goal as a special education teacher was to start with specific guidelines, not necessarily goals for each student. She notes that educational reformer, John Dewey, once said that, "Arriving at one goal is the starting point to another." This backward planning for each student became the flexible blueprint for planning for each student's future.

"I always envision what my students will be able to do in grade twelve before they graduate and then plan backwards accordingly." Catherine is a firm believer that with high expectations and a strong, stable, structured, academic environment every student can graduate. "I am a meticulous planner, planning what I hope they will be able to do in grade 9, 10, 11, and 12." The students have input in this process in selecting curriculum choices and career and life paths. "It was evident to me from my first year as a teacher that I had to be knowledgeable about my students and about the curriculum." Part of that process involves getting the students out into general education classes whenever possible and employing specialized instruction. Catherine said, "If a student loves science then I would make sure that we would tailor subjects and courses to address

that child's interests and needs." She alludes to the fact that it is now much more difficult to plan meaningful curriculum choices for students because of the constant pressures of preparing for high stakes testing. That, however, will be more fully addressed in a future interview.

As we completed the first interview I thanked Catherine for her time. I apologized for keeping her nearly two hours and indicated that she most likely wanted to get home and plan something for supper. She smiled and relayed a telling piece of information. "Oh no…now that my children are grown I'm back to being the cheerleader advisor." Late dinners are par for the course for Catherine and her husband on weekdays. The evenings that she doesn't have cheerleading practice, she teaches a dance class for college students at the local university. Active, full of life, two more adjectives I add to my list as I continue my journey of discovery of this fascinating teacher.

The goal of the first interview was to search out background information, biographical information, and have this teacher articulate her vision as a special education teacher. I begin to grin as I reflect upon the proclamation of one of Catherine's colleagues. "What are you thinking signing up to advise cheerleading again; you should let Youngblood do this!" In fact, my hunch is I think they have but I'll know better after our second interview. The second interview will sketch Catherine, the leader, to see how she meets the needs of her high school students with disabilities.

4.7 Interview Two

As I made my way down the second floor corridor past the vibrantly lit library, my mind was busy contemplating how to begin the second interview which will focus on the characteristics of leadership. Should I begin by having Catherine participate in a

quick round of associations where I state the name of a leader and she expresses what comes to mind? Do I start with quotes from great leaders and see what quotes hold the greatest appeal and meaning to this seasoned educator? Maybe I should start by asking what leaders in the field of special education have had the greatest impact on the field and upon her professional approach toward teaching. Upon reaching Catherine's classroom, I stopped and began to watch intently as she stood in the back of the room staring out the window. The room was eerily silent and empty. Her stance reminded me of our cat, Libby, who would at times crouch in the shadows consumed with territorial determination as she guarded against what she perceived to be a threat of some sort. Catherine seemed oblivious to my entry into the room. I said, "Hello I hope I am not late."

Catherine seemed pensive as she greeted me that afternoon. My look of query elicited an explanation from her. "You see those students across the street…those are some of my students." She explained how she would frequently watch to see where they went after school. "It is helpful for me to know who my students are associating with." Some of her passive students could be easily influenced and Catherine would monitor them from her second floor window to see: who was walking home and with whom they were walking, who was driving and who did they have with them, and who was hitching a ride and in whose car did they leave. "Once they cross the street they are no longer on school property so as you can see some of the students light up a cigarette as soon as their feet hit the sidewalk." As we sat down for the second interview I now knew what question to ask to begin. Do you think that you have an obligation to concern yourself with what your students do after school hours?

4.8 Leader and Follower

Catherine looked me straight in the eye and gave me an unequivocal yes! She said, “We are the trunk for the tree, before school, during school, and after school hours. The branches of the tree will never be fruitful if the trunk is not firmly grounded. We have a responsibility to support, train, and prune our tree.” The growth process is a constant process. Catherine alleges that over the years, even as the labels of students with disabilities have changed such as Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), and Other Health Impairment (OHI), the students and their needs have remained virtually unchanged. “I am a stable force in the lives of my students.”

Her ambition to inspire her students to become responsible young adults compels her to action. She continually tells her students that unless “I die tonight” I am here for you. This also means that she is there for them even “when they screw up.” She models consistency, dedication, and commitment in both her words and actions. This teacher misses school only when absolutely necessary. “I feel strongly that I need to be in school each and every day.” This desire to lead by example has served her well. “As you can tell, I am not a shy individual. I am very open to expressing myself to my students, their parents, administrators, and other teachers about what we should be doing to train each child effectively.” Starting with Burns (1978), leadership models have focused on the importance of the relationship between the leader and the follower.

This teacher adheres to the principle of the leader, in this case the teacher, modeling the way and enabling others to act. She shared the story of a young teacher

who once sought her advice in implementing classroom management procedures. “He was having difficulty with his students and admired how my students conducted themselves. I had to admit that I don’t have any formal plan or procedures that he could follow. I just set the example and I work right with them. I set it early and follow through. Everything else changes but my expectations for them to be productive young adults does not change.” Although similar to Greenleaf’s servant leadership approach, Catherine’s approach is very deliberate and has an edge to it. Collaboration to foster student achievement is not just a goal for her but rather a requirement for all.

4.9 Collaboration

According to Catherine, parents are important players in the collaborative process. Catherine is not timid in eliciting the help and support of parents and guardians. “I knock on doors and let them know they will be accountable, they will have to address me.” Surprisingly, this teacher still visits homes and schedules IEP meetings and conferences around parents’ schedules. At times this means scheduling meetings in the evenings or on weekends. “I hold high expectations for my students and parents need to do the same.” Constant communication between parents and the teacher is an important part of the collaborative process. Talking with parents on a daily basis is not uncommon and neither is devising back-up plans for students with the help of the parents when the occasion arises. Some of these special occasions have included: designing special work experiences because of discipline or health reasons, creating half-day programs for students who are expecting or with child, proactively addressing students’ emotional and mental health issues, and tackling hygiene and drug and alcohol issues. There are,

however, times when parents cannot and will not assume responsibility for helping their sons and daughters.

Without parental support Catherine invests time, resources, and energy in collaborating with other professionals and community agencies in trying to address students' unique needs. Catherine shared that she teaches in a very low socio-economic region. Many of her students have limited resources and she feels it is essential to meet their basic needs. She keeps a back closet filled with food, clothes, shoes, underwear, deodorant, and winter coats. When they need to, students may avail themselves to these items. Transformational leaders have a holistic approach when working with their followers. Without question, Catherine possesses many of the attributes of a transformational leader. She addresses much more than the academic needs of her students.

"Although it isn't part of the IEP process I take it upon myself to make sure that my students are safe and have clothes, food, and shelter." There have been occasions when this teacher has had homeless students and she has helped them find a place to live. "Not long ago one young man had an interesting senior project. The goal of the project was for him to find a place to live." Not only did the young man find a place to live, but also graduated with a great deal of hard work and help from Catherine. "I was sickened when the welfare office called me the day after the young man graduated saying that they were cutting off his benefits." This young man would have continued to receive assistance if he had not graduated but dropped out of school. Catherine acknowledged that it is helpful to have a sounding board in situations such as these.

"I have been fortunate to have a good support system over the years." Catherine has had special education colleagues, guidance counselors, administrators, and paraprofessionals who have assisted her in the delivery of effective educational opportunities for her students. She states, "If we don't share information we can't help our students." She said that many people have told her that she is an excellent organizer and that she should have pursued the route of a principal. Although she obtained her principal certification in 2002 she said she would never leave the classroom because "I want to be with the kids." Leithwood & Jantzi (2008) promote the view that an educational leader needs to be self-aware and motivate others to improve their thinking and teaching. Using that view of leadership, Catherine is an educational leader. She is a change agent who implements team-building to facilitate effective services for her students.

Both the high school assistant principal and director of pupil services seek her advice in how to best service students who are at risk. Her direct style stirs people to action. "When I see people being lax I get frustrated. Make a decision and go with it. If you are in it, you are in it…let's do what is in the best interest of the students." Catherine has been a lead teacher, department chair, and inclusion specialist. From what I have observed so far, her ability to analyze a situation and continually reinvent or redesign strategies to help her students seems to be one of her greatest assets. This was evident in my observations in her classroom. She possesses an uncanny ability as a facilitator to not only know what all of her students need at any given moment, but also smoothly transition and encourage them to take action. It isn't surprising that she is the go to

educator in both her department and the high school to form a plan for students who are struggling.

4.10 Leadership Characteristics

The second interview proved to be a fountain of information to answer my first research question of what characteristics of leadership have been shown to be successful when meeting the needs of students with disabilities. This teacher, whose leadership style is similar to that of a mother lioness, directs her students by employing her skills with precision and complex team work. She protects, trains, models, edifies, and supports her students and colleagues to impart positive student outcomes. Catherine cares deeply for both her profession and her students and is unwavering in her resolve to enable her students to become self-directed and independent young adults.

There are characteristics and qualities that surface from the collective experience of Catherine as an educational leader. First, she has a profound commitment and passion to her mission to meet the individual needs of her students with disabilities. This commitment is expressed in a desire to have each student feel valued, respected, and successful. Second is her holistic approach, transformational in nature that focuses on both the rational and emotional components of individual student aspirations and necessities. This teacher lives out Maslow's hierarchy by ensuring that her students' basic needs are met while helping them discover their vocation in life. Third, this teacher is knowledgeable regarding the best practices for students. Both administrators and teachers look to her for advice on how to help high school students succeed.

A fourth characteristic that we see in Catherine is that of an innovative and creative planner who envisions her students graduating and then plans backwards

accordingly to help them achieve this goal. According to Stronge and colleagues (2007), this planning for instruction is a defining quality of an effective teacher. Acting in the capacity of a tailor-teacher, Catherine realizes that mistakes are often made and students' progress and goals often change which involves restitching and replanning. Her support for her students throughout the process is unwavering. Indeed, she "gives voice" to the best interests of all of her students and is unabashed in expressing her concerns and desires to parents, administrators, professionals, and fellow teachers.

Fifth, as an educational leader this teacher possesses a consistency of beliefs and actions. Catherine leads by example and models the way for both her students and colleagues. Leadership for Catherine starts in the trenches and that means engaging in active listening and getting to know her students. She is not a teacher that you'll find sitting behind a desk, but rather actively engaged in the lives of her students, inside and outside the classroom.

Sixth, Catherine is a proponent of collaboration and team building to meet the varied needs of her students. She takes seriously her responsibility to coordinate each student's IEP. She maintains ongoing communication with all the professionals that help to provide an education for each of her students. To carry this out, Catherine locates or develops the necessary supports and materials to meet each student's specific needs. Additionally, she works directly with students and their parents to ensure that they are familiar with what is expected at school and can reinforce school and transitional experiences at home.

The sun was already setting as we concluded our second interview. My eyes glanced across the street where Catherine's students had stood earlier in the day. Gandhi

once said that his life is his message. How apropos this preceding quote is to Catherine. Catherine's voice replayed over and over in my head, "I am a constant for you…if you need something I'll be here for you…if you really screw up…I will definitely be here for you…unless I die tonight I am here for you." Undoubtedly this second interview underscores that people who want to help others do best by leading them. In Catherine's case it is not in the formal definition of leadership with the regality of position or office, but rather with a consistency of guidance, purpose, direction, and dedication. It requires a total commitment to the individual, believing that all are worthy, honorable and capable of good. As darkness falls Catherine keeps watch. Her silhouette will long adorn the street below like a watchful lioness standing guard over her students and their habitat.

4.11 Interview Three

"Today we had a lunch bunch meeting." Catherine beamed as she informed me of this event. What is a lunch bunch meeting? "Students eat with me in my room while we review for the upcoming PSSA exams." Catherine explained that the PSSA is the standards based criterion-referenced assessment used to measure a student's attainment of the academic state standards while also determining the degree to which school programs enable students to attain proficiency of the standards. Briefly, all students in grades three through eight and grade eleven are assessed in both reading and math. Additionally, every student in grades five, eight, and eleven are assessed in writing, and grades four, eight, and eleven in science. Currently, Pennsylvania uses individual student scores on the PSSA to assist districts to determine who may be in need of additional educational opportunities. School scores and comparisons with other districts also compel districts to change curriculum and provide remediation for students who score poorly on the state

mandated examination. Catherine affirmed that all of her students with IEPs are required to take the PSSA to fulfill the requirements of NCLB. I was very interested to see what this thriving special education teacher thought about these high stakes exams.

The intention of the third interview was to explore the second and third research questions. The second, "How are the current challenges of incorporating high stakes testing affecting the curriculum along with individual lesson plans and Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities?" The third, "How are those challenges being successfully addressed by a veteran special education teacher who is considered to be a leader in the field?" I began this interview by asking Catherine how much experience she has had with achievement testing.

Catherine shared that she has always used achievement testing with her students. "We were previously allowed to order and administer achievement tests based on each student's academic level." If a student needed to be tested on a third grade level then she could order a California Achievement test that reflected his or her present level of academic achievement and functional performance. In addition, before the current standards-based achievement tests, the special education teachers administered the Terra Nova Achievement Tests to all of their students. Catherine said that she really liked the Terra Nova because it was "attractive" and extremely "user friendly." She claims that students were not fearful to take the Terra Nova and that a lot of useful data could be gleaned from those tests to plan students IEP and learning goals. Catherine, however, has strong reservations about the current standards-achievement tests.

"All the emphasis on the PSSA tests sickens me." Catherine espouses that after years of training in brain research, technology, and differentiating learning to meet the

varied needs of learners, it boggles the mind that "we hand them a paper and pencil test" to assess their learning. "I am extremely sad that I don't have the time to do for students what I instinctively know that I need to do because of the constant focus on Pennsylvania standards to prepare them for the state assessments." She explains that a lot of the material that she must now cover is meaningless to many of her students. "I am currently covering geometric and algebraic concepts to prepare my students for the PSSA. Here we are practicing with graphing calculators to do sequencing when some of my students are at a third and fourth grade level when it comes to math and reading." She notes that all of this review takes time and that it is often time that could have been spent addressing practical skills. "Sadly, many of my students are frustrated, disgusted, and numb to achievement testing."

Catherine acknowledges that there are tremendous political pressures to meet AYP and receive maximum funding for schools. She also agrees that achievement testing is "a part of who we are and what we do." She sat straight up and pointedly stated that, "there is so much more than testing, however, that needs done to help our students be successful." She shares this recent vignette of Jim. Jim was not proficient on his PSSA tests his junior year. He had to retake them again in October of his senior year. Jim gave his all with the continuous reviews to prepare for the retest. Jim did not, however, pass the tests the second time. Jim did, however, successfully complete his modified senior project and looked the transition coordinator in the eye and shook his hand during his transition meeting. Jim functions at a second grade reading level and third grade level in mathematics. He understands directions and models appropriate behavior and social skills. Jim thinks it is fun and rewarding to work and feels good about his

accomplishments. According to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Jim is not successful because he was not proficient on his PSSA tests. Therein is the conundrum of Jim and his educational program. Therein is the challenge for Catherine and today's special education teachers. How do you continue to meet the individual needs of your students as mandated by IDEA in this high stakes testing environment?

Catherine says that she puts the best face on the high stakes environment. "I encourage my students to do the best job that they can do." She explains that life is about choices and making forward progress. "I focus on improvement and encourage my students to do the same. Maybe you started at a 9% accuracy level but now you're up to a 20% level. Let's focus on that and feel good about the progress!" Accordingly, she meets with students every six weeks to document how much progress they are making with both their IEP goals and with benchmark goals from the state standards. "I administer my own benchmark tests which give me an understanding of student competencies and help me plan individual instruction to remediate weaknesses." An important part of the process involves focusing on individual student strengths rather than limitations. "I know my students often better than they know themselves and know when it is time to press forward and time to switch gears and do something else."

To illustrate this point, Catherine shared this story about tutoring for the high stakes achievement tests. Back when her students were fully included in PSSA testing for the first time they were assigned to tutors for remediation because of their poor scores on the tests. These tutors became extremely frustrated with the lack of progress that her students with disabilities were making. "Many of my students functioned at a very low level and were not able to grasp a lot of the higher order and independent tasks expected

from the tutors who were using the remediation materials." It became evident that tutoring as it was structured was not going to be successful and it caused anxiety, frustration, and discipline problems for the students and for the tutor. Catherine stepped in and convinced her administrator that she should assume responsibility for tutoring her students.

Although it meant giving up her planning period and lunch period, Catherine became the tutor for all of her students. With the push for full inclusion, the amount of time Catherine has with her students is limited. To compensate for this lack of one-on-one time and encourage her students to come for tutoring, she uses "the lunch bunch time" and "pizza parties" (that she purchases) after the school day. "I had to become creative and more efficient in how I tutor these students." When they come for tutoring they make use of individualized computer programs, small group instruction, and guided practice where the teacher is able to facilitate student learning and employ specialized instructional strategies. This personal approach is reinforcing for the students and helps them make sense of what they are learning.

Dale Carnegie once said that if you "act enthusiastic then you will be enthusiastic." Catherine uses this principle well. Her positive and personal approach when helping students face the challenges of high stakes testing encourages them to do their best. Indeed, she rewards successive approximations with her enthusiasm, smile, time, and food for the soul. High stakes testing is helping to reshape special education by requiring students with disabilities to meet the same state standards as their nondisabled peers. Rather than lamenting about the difficulties, Catherine is busy collecting diagnostic data, selecting instructional strategies and materials, and designing her

curricula and instruction to support her students with the current accountability system. In her efforts to highlight and document her students' progress, Catherine uses electronic portfolios. "Electronic portfolios are excellent tools to illustrate how well my students are progressing and accentuate their accomplishments." These portfolios also capture a student's skills, interests, and achievements regarding both their IEP goals and state standard goals. "Students appreciate seeing their hard work, contributions, and forward progress." She conveys that for her students, high stakes assessments lets people see what they "can't do" while electronic portfolios show people "what they can do."

Catherine asserts, "I don't think high stakes testing is going away but I do think it will change for our students." One example would be the need for varied forms for some of her students with autistic spectrum disorders. These students look for patterns and often have issues with textures, lighting, and traditional classroom materials, arrangements, and testing procedures. "If we are going to hold students with disabilities to the same accountability measures as their non-disabled peers, then testing instruments and procedures must change to accommodate for a wide variety of learners."

As our third interview concluded, the old adage of not throwing the baby out with the bathwater came to mind. I was impressed with how Catherine was making the most of the pressures of high stakes testing. She views testing as an opportunity for each student to make meaningful progress at his/her own pace toward meeting state standards. She does, however, worry that "what is not tested is often not taught" and that can have unfortunate consequences for many students with disabilities. Repeatedly, Catherine expressed the fact that there is not enough time in the school day to effectively address

student's IEP goals and objectives, while adequately preparing them for accountability assessments.

This, combined with the added pressure of ensuring that students are being educated in general education with all of the support services they need to help them be successful, means that special educators like Catherine must be knowledgeable and competent to perform the varied aspects of their profession. Catherine says, "At times things seem very backward to me when a student cannot tell time but, I am expected to spend more time on advanced algebraic equations to prepare them for the PSSA tests." This is the dilemma that faces all special education teachers and that is the topic for the final interview question; what does it mean to be an effective special education teacher in the current educational climate?

The third interview provided illustrations for answering the second and third research questions on the challenges of high stakes testing and special education planning. Based on Stronge's (2007) summary of effective teacher dimensions, Catherine effectively assesses her students by monitoring their individual progress and providing differentiation to meet their unique needs. To meet individual challenges Catherine employs the P^2 approach. To be precise it is the positive and personal approach. Being positive means being a cheerleader and encouraging her students to do their best by providing enthusiasm, time, encouragement rewards, and distinctive electronic portfolios. Being personal means providing tutoring and instruction that is tailored to fit each student's needs. In short, making use of individualized computer programs and technology, direct and small group instruction, and guided practice where the teacher is able to facilitate student learning and put into practice specialized instructional strategies.

Although the P² approach is a laudable goal, I couldn't help but wonder how successful it is even with an educator like Catherine. That contemplation with all its nuances leads me to my final research question. What does it mean to be an effective special education teacher in the current educational climate?

4.12 Interview Four

"It is a learning process for everybody." Thus sayeth Catherine. The final interview takes place in the recreation center at the local university. Portraits of people are comprised of realistic strokes with varied tones. The multi-colored canvas of Catherine is being created with light and heavy pressure slowly, quickly, intricately, painting the themes and persona of the portrait of this interesting teacher. I wait as Catherine's college students slowly exit her classroom. Students adorned in shorts, tights, sweats, oversized t-shirts, and capris fill my eyes as they make their way to the closest drinking fountain. Panting heavily and sweating profusely, it is very evident that their dance class has proven to be quite a work out. I smile as I hear students bidding farewell to their teacher as she greets each dancer on the way out the door. Her penchant for intimately knowing her students continues with her college students as she converses with students about their lives. My expectation is that meeting in this setting will provide more meaning and shades of color to add to my portraiture. Catherine breaks my train of thought with, "Are you ready to get started?" Catherine, looking in better shape than most of her college students, stands in front of me primed to begin our interview after a full day of teaching high school and a successful dance class.

I am ready to explore the fourth research question, what does it mean to be an effective teacher in the field of special education in the current educational climate? I

start this interview by asking Catherine her definition of a good teacher. She pauses and says, “A good teacher is a good student.” She shares a favorite Latin proverb that says by “learning you will teach, and by teaching you will learn.” Catherine detests it when teachers say that they teach math, social studies, English, or science. “I teach students not subjects” and according to Catherine that is what defines a good teacher. “Students must know that a teacher cares about them as persons. They will reach for the stars if they think that this teacher has faith in me and believes in me.” Part of the process involves respecting the students as co-learners and young adults who are “responsible for their actions.” Catherine interjects, “I am often the disciplinarian for students with disabilities.”

4.13 Discipline

“I have always handled discipline on my own.” Catherine shares that many of her students have a less than stellar home life and that for the four years she has them she is a stable authority figure in their lives. “Many of the students see me as a parental figure because I care about them, I love them, and I am there for them.” She continues, “I am there for you day after day, come thick or thin, I have high expectations for you, I correct you even when you don’t like it.” She guardedly shares a story. “Years ago you could touch students and I had an occasion where I chose to do so to discipline one of my young ladies.”

This student was a very large and boisterous young lady. She was constantly challenging authority and the other students. Her daily fashion wear included a black leather jacket adorned with an assortment of gold chains. Her behavior was particularly unruly when she had physical education. The physical education teacher Miss M. brought

her down to my room to talk with me about her behavior during gym. As Miss. M. shared her frustration with this young lady giving her a hard time, my student copped an attitude and began to curse at Miss. M. Several attempts to redirect the student went nowhere and I lightly slapped the student which immediately caught her attention. Needless to say, the very next day I got a call from her mother. The daughter told her what had transpired and she apologized for her daughter's behavior. She did ask that the next time she needed to be disciplined that I don't slap her on the face but rather "smack her across the ass." "We never had trouble with this student again and she was the first child in her family to graduate from high school."

Ironically this teacher was creating Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) for students years before they existed. Her behavioral expectations and classroom management skills distinguish her according to Stronge (2007) as an effective educator. She has always had a great deal of input into the discipline process for her students. She says that, "although assistant principals determine the consistency of discipline, I have always been actively involved because the punishment may affect their IEP." Some of the newer teachers question Catherine as to why she "punishes herself" by disciplining her own students rather than sending them to alternative settings such as in-school suspension. She states, "I don't feel that way at all…a student is obviously having trouble and we need time to work through that together." Often this intervention will take place while the two eat lunch together.

Catherine likens this to her own home where problem solving often took place around the kitchen table between her, her husband, and her two children. "My own children needed time to vent and work through difficult issues." She added that her own

children learned early on to be sensitive to the needs of others. “They had hell to pay if they even made fun of or ridiculed someone.” This inclusive attitude extends to all students that Catherine encounters. “We need to educate students that differences are valued.” This involves teaching them about person-first terminology and appropriate vocabulary. “I am very upfront with my cheerleaders teaching them not to use words like retard.” The cheerleaders are taught to be respectful to students with disabilities and they let Catherine know when they witness problems with her students. “Whether my student is inappropriate or another student is inappropriate towards them I consistently address these issues.” She says, “These are teachable moments and they are an on-going learning process for everybody.”

4.14 Inclusion

Another teachable situation for Catherine has centered on the move toward inclusion beginning in the 1980’s when the Regular Education Initiative (REI) was initiated by Madeleine Will, the former Assistant Secretary in the United States Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Will (1986) argued for a restructured system where general educators and special educators would collaborate more and share responsibility for all students. With the passage of NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEA, Will’s vision for education has become a reality with all students now having access to the general education curriculum and schools being accountable for student achievement in a standards-based curriculum. Catherine says that, “Inclusion is not a new concept; my goal has always been to move our students into the general education curriculum.” She adds, “If students are fully included and doing well then they should no longer be in special education.” That aligns with her goal of helping students blossom so

they can become independent and productive young adults. I was surprised to hear her say that many students with disabilities "still struggle with inclusion."

She espouses that for inclusion to work well it requires the use of both "formal and natural supports." She characterizes formal supports as the supports that are provided by and funded through the public school system. Examples include: highly qualified teachers, school support professionals, aides, and specially designed instructional materials to meet students' unique needs. These supports are critical in helping students with disabilities receive ongoing assessment designed to address each individual student's learning needs. Catherine notes that natural supports are the individuals that nurture and support a student. Examples may include: family, friends, bus drivers, secretaries, and teammates. These individuals nurture and support the student and provide laughter, significance, value, and love. Catherine views the special education teacher as a vital link in the facilitating of supports for their students. To illustrate this she shares a story.

"I want to share a story with you." A few years ago our ninth grade students were falling through the cracks when they reached the high school. For the most part they were doing very poorly in their core academic subjects and often seemed lost in their classes. Both the academic and social demands at the high school were causing them a great deal of anxiety and stress and it appeared as if our approach toward inclusion was not working. "The support networks for our students were not adequate enough to meet their needs." Catherine acted and decided to pressure the administration to make a dramatic change. She voices "that a good special education teacher needs to challenge the process all the time to help your students…if you don't, you're not being effective." She was able

to convince the administration to move the eighth graders to the high school and assimilate them slowly into the system.

According to Catherine, the eighth grade students were coming out of middle school environments where they were being "coddled" and were not taught how to be accountable for their performance. The high school environment was much more challenging and she was the leader in helping to design an educational approach that encouraged the students with disabilities to become more active learners. "When we received the eighth grade students we issued curriculum-based measurements and comprehensive assessments to determine what type of inclusive model would best fit the needs of each child." By working directly with each student, they tailored a program that helped them become successful. This meant implementing co-teaching models with general education teachers who were trained in differentiating instruction. It also meant factoring in personalities of both students and teachers and to foster supportive educational environments. According to Catherine, "We kept our students close at hand until they were able to move further away on their own."

Both the formal and natural supports were structured to provide maximum benefit to the students with disabilities. This meant keeping the eighth and ninth grade students apart from the 10th-12th grade population for the most part. They interacted with teachers and classmates that understood their age-appropriate needs. There were eighth and ninth grade teams that met one period a day to collaborate to help students. Catherine declared that her goal was to have all students fully included in the general education curriculum by the time they were juniors and seniors. For students that require a great deal of structure, Catherine has them check in and out with her each day to document their

progress and address their concerns. “For our students to make it to graduation they must feel supported and connected.” Sadly, general education teachers can sometimes sacrifice the education of students with disabilities by ignoring a student’s unique learning needs and requiring all students to learn the same material, at the same time, and in the same way.

“When it comes to collaborating for my students, some teachers are wonderful and some teachers openly admit that they don’t want to be bothered!” Catherine reflects that age is not a factor in their mindset because some of the most resistant teachers are the youngest, recently out of college, who were taught about differentiation and accommodation. She shares that “just today I had a conversation with a general education teacher who is fairly new in her position.” This teacher has a student that Catherine has worked very hard with the past few years trying to help her feel that “she is a capable and successful student.” Repeatedly this general education teacher fights against accommodating this student although her IEP is explicit in what she needs to be successful. “I said to the teacher that I am sorry that you cannot differentiate instruction for your course.” She said that what she meant was “I’m sorry that you are so stubborn and refuse to adjust your thinking regarding this student.” Catherine told this teacher that they need to meet at length to discuss adaptations of her curriculum to help this young lady be successful. She offers to meet at a time that is convenient for the general education teacher. “You know me, I will meet with parents or teachers at five o’clock at night if that is what it takes. I can be as relentless as a pit-bull and I don’t let them get out of it.”

Catherine realizes that inclusion requires collaboration and that to effectively collaborate it takes a great deal of time. She makes this happen before school, after school, during her planning period, during her lunch break, whenever it is possible. "When I collaborate it is on my own time, but I personally visit all of the general education teachers that educate my students." These visits are not exclusive to the core academic teachers but also extend to elective teachers, shop teachers, and career and technical teachers. "Today I visited a student in vo-tech and, with input from his teacher, helped him prepare to take his hazardous materials safety test." "The notion that it takes a village to raise a child can be modified to; it takes a faculty of the willing." She notes that a willingness and persona that believe that they can effectively include and educate all of their students is fundamental to ensuring that "inclusion works to the maximum extent possible."

4.15 Scheduling

Catherine is very familiar with the strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, concerns, opinions, and ideas of her students. "I have always done most of the scheduling for my high school students." Her students trust her to help create schedules that, regardless of the severity of their disability, are challenging and rewarding. She notes that "some content is important for all students to learn to proficiency and others are not." Deciding what is important and probable for each student is a prerequisite to planning their course schedules. "The quality of instruction is also one of my considerations when I schedule students into courses." Catherine acknowledges that some teachers are very skilled at scaffolding instruction and differentiating to meet students' unique needs. "Since my students are expected to meet the same content area standards as their non-

disabled peers, I have a responsibility to make sure that they receive the best instruction possible."

Catherine schedules her students into classes where they will receive high quality instruction and the supports that they need. "I appreciate teachers who have a love of learning because I know they instill that passion in the students they teach." She also welcomes teachers who demonstrate knowledge of their content while "facilitating interventions as well as different types of assessment." The general education teachers give input into the IEP process as well by discussing the student's strengths, weaknesses, and possible strategies and supports for success.

4.16 Do No Harm

Catherine is a strong believer in staying current with her professional knowledge and pedagogical approaches. As a lead teacher she directed the special education and inclusion teachers to attend as much training as possible. "In two weeks I will be attending a Response to Intervention (RTI) training to learn about its possibilities to help struggling learners." Catherine will be taking general education teachers with her to the training because she feels strongly that special education teachers and general education teachers "must learn to plan, teach, and problem solve collaboratively" to effectively address students' needs. "I empathize with general education teachers at the high school level because they are now required to co-teach but often are not equipped for this task." Catherine affirms that it is not that they don't want to co-teach, but rather it is a lack of training, co-planning time, and experience with adapting curriculum and instruction. The RTI model that is being proposed at the secondary level requires instruction and interventions to be matched to student needs across the curriculum. According to

Catherine, this model will require "continuous monitoring of progress" for all students who are struggling and general education teachers will be mandated to be the facilitators of interventions for academic success. "Providing highly responsive instruction through collaborative teaching is not an easy task and requires a great deal of diplomacy."

Catherine is often the ambassador for special education and has "an open door policy." "I learned years ago to counter the mystique of special education you have to be very welcoming to others." For her this has meant allowing general education teachers and other professionals who provide direct or indirect services to students with disabilities to visit her classroom when it is convenient for them. "There is a multitude of individuals who help our students like: speech and language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, school psychologists, transition coordinators, instructional technology coordinators, vocational trainers and job coaches, and government and advocacy representatives." Catherine feels that it is important to work cooperatively and build relationships with these individuals to support and empower her students. "These relationships help us communicate effectively and afford the students the opportunity to get to know these individuals."

One of Catherine's pet peeves is when professionals, who do not intimately know her students, visit them and "talk about them and not with them." "One example is a representative from the local Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP) who set up a meeting with one of my students." The representative invited a case worker from Children and Youth and the local Guidance Center to create a plan to help this child with "emotional problems." Although they met at the high school, none of these individuals had ever met this student nor did they ask for Catherine's input or the input of

other educators who work directly with this student. “This student came because she was very upset with what transpired at this meeting and I had the responsibility of dealing with the fallout.” Catherine said she learned a long time ago that to respect students you have to “listen more than you talk.” “Had these professionals listened to this young lady, they would have better understood her situation.” As indicated by Catherine, to be effective as a special education teacher it is imperative to have excellent diplomatic skills, to plan and support each other, and “do no harm to the students who are receiving the help and support.”

The sun had set on the recreation center. Catherine, still attired in her dance class outfit looked pensively in my direction. She asked, “Are you sure that is enough?” Another adjective came to mind, unpretentious. This teacher became apologetic that she did not have enough to share and offered an alternative. “Maybe you’d like to interview some additional special education teachers to get additional information.” “I could arrange for you to meet other teachers maybe at a different grade level.” I politely declined her request and tried to reassure her that she had given me all that I had hoped for. I thanked her for her passion, dedication, and heart for service.

As we parted, the security lights flooded the parking lot of the recreation center. The Indian artist Tagore (1922) once wrote that, “A teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself and a lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame.” I thought to myself that Tagore must have been inspired by his own Catherine when he composed that line. As I stood silently in the parking lot and watched Catherine’s headlights fade slowly away into chilly hours of darkness, I was reminded of Catherine the watchtower, peering out her classroom window lighting the way for her

students below. Catherine the teacher shares her light and that light brightens the coming and the going of the students who need her spark the most.

The research question for the final interview was "What does it mean to be an effective teacher in the field of special education in the current educational climate?" By peeling back the layers of the special educator, Catherine, the likeness of an effective teacher materializes before your eyes.

First, an effective special educator cares about each student as a person. This means using a holistic approach that respects students and is responsive to their academic, social, emotional, transitional, and behavioral needs. "I am there for you day after day, come thick or thin, I have high expectations for you, and I correct you even when you don't like it." An effective teacher demonstrates daily this unconditional love and support both inside and outside the classroom.

Second, an effective special education teacher is an effective disciplinarian. This means being actively involved in the entire discipline process and using the reckoning process as a "teachable moment" to help students accept responsibility for their actions and plan for the future.

Third, being an effective teacher means being an orchestrator of both formal and natural supports for students. This requires being educated in the formal academic supports that the district offers and finding creative avenues to help the natural supports flourish in the lives of students with disabilities. In addition, it requires being knowledgeable about how to best serve the needs of each student and schedule accordingly to meet individual student needs.

Fourth, an effective special education teacher has to be a successful diplomat and ambassador for both their profession and for their students. This requires networking and collaborating with the professionals, agencies, and service providers that service their students with IEPs. This requires the diplomatic skills of being a bridge builder with "an open door policy" when it is required and being a dissenter who "challenges the system" for the good of the students when necessary. In deed and action these teachers educate others about the worth of all individuals and the value of diversity and differences.

Fifth, an effective special educator has to be a first-rate collaborator and co-teacher who exhibits strong pedagogical and managerial skills to plan "highly responsive instruction for their students." These teachers recognize best practices and make certain that their students have access to high quality instruction, materials, and assessments. Finally, an effective special education teacher is an effective life-long learner. This involves staying current with both professional knowledge and pedagogical approaches and seeking on-going training to help their students succeed.

The interviews with Catherine are finished but the interweaving of the final shades of her portraiture requires further artistic creation. The final chapter will draw together an understanding of this special educator as a leader, as a person, as a classroom manager and organizer, as a monitor of student progress and potential, and as an effective instructor who makes a difference in the lives of the students that she encounters.

CHAPTER 5

FRAMING THE PORTRAITURE

"Teaching was my destiny, it found me." – Catherine

5.1 Final Stitching

Catherine's portraiture was drawn with a blending of internal context (physical setting), personal context (researcher's perspective background and presence) and the historical context (journey, culture, evolution) of the topic. In this final chapter of the dissertation it will be useful to return to the quilt metaphor of a tailor-teacher one last time, examining the way in which it illustrates the act of aesthetic experience while viewing a patchwork of artistry and purpose. In the final quilt, all of the patches have been created, blended, and sewn together. All that remains is to find the quilt rack of its audience. Catherine's quotes merge together each of the findings with reference to teacher effectiveness as seen through the eyes of Catherine the special educator.

Additionally, it is now time to step back and view the completed study by analyzing an effective special teacher as a leader, as a person, as a classroom manager and organizer, as a monitor of student progress and potential, and as an effective instructor. My analyses and interpretations will hopefully shed light on the wide-ranging and extensive topic of what constitutes an effective special education teacher.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) wrote, "There is never a single story; many could be told" (p. 10); there will always be someone who wants the researcher to tell another story. Therein is the significance of this study to expand the field of special education by ultimately encouraging other teachers, practitioners, and professionals to add their stories to this portraiture and hearten countless teachers, students, and parents who are

desperately seeking committed, caring, and competent professionals in the field of special education.

5.2 Special Education Teacher as a Leader

"The notion that it takes a village to raise a child can be modified to; it takes a faculty of the willing." – Catherine

The research showed that this special educator leads by example. Stronge (2007) writes that effective teachers are "informal leaders" who the school administrators "typically call on for opinions and help in effecting change" (p. 29). This study demonstrated this view by portraying an effective special educator as an ambassador who "continually challenges the process" to facilitate collaboration between administrators, teachers, and professionals to bring about changes that help students with disabilities. This teacher is self-aware and unabashed about encouraging others to improve both their "thinking and teaching" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). This type of leadership does not go it alone but rather encourages "complex team work." Jim Collins (2007), as cited in Buford (2008), calls this "modern day participatory leadership" a leadership that gets the best "who" into the room to decide the best "what" for implementing change. This approach facilitates innovative ideas and new directions. Effective special education teachers use their educational expertise to facilitate and coordinate these types of responsive teams to help their students succeed.

The research showed that an educational leader and effective special education teacher has a heartfelt commitment, passion, and vision to meet the individual needs of their students with disabilities. This is not unlike Steven Covey's view of a transformational leader. In Covey's (2004), "The 8th Habit," he argues that the purpose

of a transformational leader is to change people in "mind and heart, enlarge vision, insight and understanding, and clarify purposes." In this dissertation and as stated by Catherine, this equates to "being a stable force in the student's lives" to help them raise their levels of achievement. Indeed, being the strong "trunk of the tree" means nourishing the academic, emotional, rational, vocational, and basic needs of the students. Bass (1985) states that based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, transformational leaders genuinely work hard at meeting the basic needs of their followers to transform their ideals, attitudes, and organization. The teacher leader in this study has both an "open-door policy" and "open-cabinet policy" that invites both professionals and students to satisfy their longing for respect, understanding, and dignity and to empower others to do the same. In that sense she possesses many of the attributes of a transformational leader.

An analysis of the research also reveals that an effective leader in the field of special education possesses a consistency of guidance, purpose, direction, and dedication to the field and to the students they teach. Kouzes & Posner (2003), co-authors of Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why people Demand It, write that a leader's credibility is based on their words and actions. Briefly, if people do not believe in the messenger based on their words and deeds, then they will not believe in their message. The teacher in this study demonstrates this type of steadfast resolve in her beliefs and actions. She uses her words and actions to demonstrate that all students are worthy, teachable, and capable of good.

Based on her example, an effective teacher leader in special education is self-assured and confidently humble. These educators are knowledgeable, honest, and competent, and share information even when one may prefer not to hear it. Additionally,

these leaders look for solutions not excuses, and accept responsibility for their actions while expecting others to do the same. This means using a direct approach that stirs people to do something. As Catherine said, "When I see people being lax I get frustrated. Make a decision and go with it. If you are in it, you are in it…let's do what is in the best interest of the students." These leaders know what direction they want to go and are not timid in directing others in that direction to help their students. Since these leaders are also skilled at using their "emotional intelligence" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008) to influence the emotions of others, their persona inspire others to act.

5.3 Special Education Teacher as a Person

"Although it isn't a part of the IEP process, I take it upon myself to make sure that my students are safe and have clothes, food, and shelter." – Catherine

Based on the research from this study an effective teacher is not only self-aware of their emotions but also someone with personal qualities that provide them with an ability to relate to their students and convey a sense that they matter. These educators believe strongly that "they teach students not subjects" and employ a positive and personal approach in their efforts to educate. These educators trust that they can help all students regardless of their background or academic levels. Their teacher efficacy demonstrates (Armor, 1976 as cited in Stronge, 2007) that effective teachers can "get through" even to children with unsteady motivation or home background. As with the teacher in this study, these educators appreciate the "uniqueness and diversity" of each child and continually look for creative ways to enrich their mind and spirit. This holistic approach is demonstrated in their encouraging and supportive words and in their actions both inside and outside the classroom.

Langer (2000) states that teachers who are effective demonstrate much more than a respectful attitude toward their students. Indeed, they develop and exhibit a caring relationship with their students. This is a step beyond being a positive role model. It means working side by side with the students to help them achieve success. This study repeatedly reinforced the concept of the teacher acting in that type of an apprentice capacity in the lives of the students. "I just set the example and I work right with them to become productive young adults." This is not a haphazard process but rather a meticulous process of planning and goal setting. Effective special educators know their students and provide them with a strong, stable, structured, environment to help them along their educational, career and life paths.

Stronge (2007) writes that caring teachers who succeed with at-risk students are typically "compassionate, tolerant, open-minded, motivating, nurturing, firm, and dedicated" (p.32). This study also shows that they are virtually omniscient when it comes to their students with disabilities. They are intimately aware of their students' likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, concerns, opinions, ideas, passions, social networks and formal and natural supports. These teachers give voice to the best interests of students and relay that to parents, administrators, professionals, and fellow teachers.

The bond of trust and support that develops between the students and their teacher facilitates risk taking and intellectual growth and development. These skills are extremely important to special educators who must have knowledge of the student's ability to follow directions and his or her self-management skills, specific skills in academic, functional, and behavioral areas, and communication skills and abilities. Orchestrating

learning tasks and activities to maximize each student's involvement requires a teacher such as Catherine who is detail-oriented and an efficient manager of time.

5.4 Special Education Teacher as a Classroom Manager and Organizer

"I focus on improvement and encourage my students to do the same." – Catherine

Whether it was managing a highly productive classroom, planning authentic instruction as a Title I helper, coordinating a school-based job training program, reconfiguring inclusion programming to include eighth grade students, arranging student IEP and transition meetings, or directing after school tutoring sessions for PSSA testing, this study highlighted the importance of having a special education teacher who has strong managerial and organizational skills. Effective teachers are practical problem solvers and can size up a situation and seamlessly shift from one procedure and routine to another. Stronge (2007) describes these teachers who are effective managers as having "with-it-ness" because they are adept at discerning and addressing potential student problems. The special education teacher in this study possessed this "with-it-ness."

These teachers are thoroughly prepared and keep their students actively involved in their learning. In addition, these effective teachers run their classrooms like well-oiled machines minimizing distractions and anticipating potential problems. Catherine stated that she "set the example" and that the students followed her lead. Without question she had highly organized routines and procedures and her students knew what was expected of them when they were in her classroom. This afforded the opportunity to provide differentiated instruction to meet the varied needs of students. Students were able to be self-directed learners and avail themselves to computer programs, assisted technology,

and independent practice and review. The teacher was attentive to student needs and intervened to help each child when it was necessary.

Effective teachers are effective managers and organizers. This provides the students with a sense of safety and well-being. There are few disruptions and, if discipline or behavioral issues surface, these teachers are confident in addressing them. The teacher in this study was a firm believer in using discipline problems as teachable moments. She handled these issues effectively and proactively and gave of her own time to prove that she was committed to the student and their individual issues. This individualized approach gave students needed practice in goal setting and opportunities to address their unmet needs and emotional concerns. Students also critically examined their own behaviors and performance and planned a course of action for the future. Monitoring student progress and potential is an essential characteristic of an effective special education teacher.

5.5 Special Education Teacher as a Monitor of Student Progress and Potential

"Life is about choices and making forward progress." – Catherine

This study highlighted the importance of providing ongoing and continuous evaluation of performance of each student with a disability. Effective special education teachers are skilled at identifying their students' most critical educational, behavioral, social, and transitional needs and strengths. The teacher in this study is skilled at using curriculum-based assessment and measurement, performance assessment, and portfolio assessment to assess students and then design curricula and instruction to support their unique needs. According to Haertel (1999), this is a defining characteristic of effective

teachers who review progress over time using an accumulated body of work such as a portfolio. According to Catherine, students desire positive progress and welcome the use of electronic portfolios to showcase their achievements. These portfolios also capture students' skills, interests, and achievements regarding both their IEP goals and state standard goals. "Students appreciate seeing their hard work, contributions, and forward progress."

Accordingly, this study demonstrated that an effective teacher expects students to succeed and provides them meaningful feedback. The teacher in this study meets with students every six weeks to document how much progress they are making with both their IEP goals and with benchmark goals from the state standards. "I administer my own benchmark tests which give me an understanding of student competencies and help me plan individual instruction to remediate weaknesses." An important part of the process involves focusing on individual student strengths rather than limitations. This approach celebrates forward progress and growth and encourages students to accept responsibility, become self-directed learners, and plan for their future.

An effective special educator expects success but also has a back-up plan for students if and when it becomes necessary. The teenage years are filled with changes: physical, social, and emotional. These changes are often even more difficult for a child with a disability. This study accentuates the importance of having a grounded special education teacher who is there for students no matter what. Successfully monitoring student progress and potential includes reconfiguring a student's schedule and educational program when they need additional help and support. The teacher in this study shared instances when this was necessary such as: designing special work

experiences because of discipline or health reasons, creating half-day programs for students who are expecting or with child, proactively addressing student's emotional and mental health issues, and tackling hygiene and drug and alcohol issues. By continually monitoring and adjusting student progress and supports, an effective special education teacher stays connected to their students and remains a stable force in their lives.

5.6 Special Education Teacher as an Effective Instructor

"I had to become creative and more efficient in how I tutor these students." – Catherine

Stronge (2007) argues that effective teachers are successful at planning and implementing instruction. Special education teachers are charged with the responsibility of providing day-to-day instruction for their students with disabilities. This study showed that an effective high school special educator provides remedial instruction (re-teaching), developmental instruction (teaching based on the student's functional learning level), and strategic instruction (teaching tool skills and reviewing important curricular concepts and skills that the curriculum has addressed minimally or has neglected altogether to help the students succeed). The infusion of high stakes testing and standards driven accountability measures have forced special education teachers to become more efficient in how they prioritize and organize their instruction. Effective teachers like Catherine have addressed this issue by providing time, encouragement, and food for the soul. Catherine's approach is to encourage her students to seek her out before school, during lunch, and after school to provide individualized instruction, tutoring, and review. She has not backed away from or abandoned using developmental instruction with students like Jim to address developmental delays and important practical skills. Indeed, effective

teachers like Catherine provide intensive instruction and intervention to remediate severe academic deficits.

Providing intensive instruction involves using kinesthetic, community-based, and authentic learning experiences to provide a depth of knowledge and connection to the real world to enrich student learning. This study reveals how successful a special educator can be when they look for "creative ways" to enrich the mind and spirit of their students. This creativity requires a commitment on the part of the teacher to not limit themselves to their own classroom but provide as many opportunities as possible for students to acquire skills in a variety of environments. Catherine visits her students at their vocational education classroom, at their work sites, in their elective classes, and in their homes. She also interfaces with general education teachers, employers, coaches, club sponsors, parents and guardians, service providers, and community agencies to make learning at school relevant to the day to day lives of her students.

Langer (as cited in Tucker & Stronge, 2005) says that effective teachers of at-risk students use a wide variety of instructional strategies to make connections and build understanding for their students. This study underscored that notion by demonstrating that an effective special education teacher makes use of both formal and natural supports to build understanding and address each individual student's unique needs. The students, who Catherine calls "the branches of the tree," are nourished by the formal supports of qualified teachers, professionals, aides, and specially designed instruction. The leaves of the tree, or natural supports, bestow beauty to each student by providing laughter, significance, value, and love. An effective special education instructor provides the trunk

of the tree and magnificently facilitates the growth process for each and every child no matter what the season or weather conditions above.

This study used Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman's (2007) table of teacher effectiveness dimensions and related research which highlighted four dimensions of teacher effectiveness to explore the special education teacher in this study. The original table (included on page 6) has now been revised to reflect how Catherine, the effective special education teacher, demonstrates and shows evidence of instruction, student assessment, learning environment, and personal teacher qualities. The table is shown on page 104.

Table 1 ***Summary of teacher effectiveness dimensions and related research (as cited in J. Pers Educ (2007) p.169***		**Application to Study**
Dimensions of Teacher Effectiveness	**Representative Research Base**	**Special Education Teacher Catherine**
Instruction Focus on instruction	Allington 2002; Darling-Hammond 2000; Johnson 1997; Wenglinsky 2000	Remedial instruction (re-teaching), developmental instruction (based on functional learning level), strategic instruction (necessary foundational skills)
Expectations for achievement Planning for instruction Range of strategies Questioning	Peart and Campbell 1991; Wenglinsky 2002; Good and Brophy 1997; Jay 202; Shellard and Protheroe 2000; Pressley et al. 2004; Walsh and Sattes 2005; Weiss et al. 2003 Eisner 2003/2004; Peart and Campbell 1991; Sternberg 2003; Zahorik et al. 2003	Time, encouragement, food for the soul Kinesthetic, community-based, authentic instruction Visitations to students general education classrooms, vocational educational classrooms, elective classes, employers, homes, club sponsors, service providers, and community agencies
Student Engagement Homework	Cawelti 2004; Walsh and Sattes 2005; Wenglinsky 2002 Allington 2002; Berliner 1986; Cawelti 2004; Cotton 2000; Johnson 1997	Holistic approach, transformational in nature that focuses on the rational, academic and emotional components of individual student aspirations, necessities, and forward progress
Student Assessment Monitor student progress	Cotton 2000; Foegen et al. 2007; Janisch and Johnson 2003; Yesseldyke and Bolt 2005	Skilled at using curriculum-based assessment & measurement, performance assessment, and portfolio assessment to identify and address students' educational, behavioral, social, and transitional needs and strengths. Expects students to succeed & provides meaningful feedback every 6 weeks, benchmark goals & IEP goals Back up plans because of academic, discipline or health reasons, 1/2 day programs for students expecting or with child, emotional, mental health, drug and alcohol issues
Differentiation	Shellard and Protheroe 2000; Tomlinson 1999, 2003; VanTassel-Baska 2005	Individualized Planning
Learning environment Classroom management	Johnson 1997; Marzano et al. 2003; Pressley et al. 2004; Wang et al.1993	Managed highly productive classroom, coordinating school-based job training, reconfiguring 8th grade inclusion program, arranging student IEP and transition meetings, directing after school PSSA tutoring sessions "with-it-ness" (Stronge, 2007) adept at discerning and addressing student discipline, social, and emotional problems
Organization Behavioral expectations	McLeod et al. 2003; Zahorik et al. 2003 Good and Brophy 1997; Hamre and Pianta 2005; Marzano 2003; Pressley et al. 2004	Innovative and creative planner who envisions her students graduating and then plans backwards accordingly to help them achieve this goal.
Personal qualities Caring Fairness and respect Interactions with students	Boyle-Baise 2005; Collinson et al. 1999; McBer 2000; Peart and Campell 1999; Corbet and Wilson 2002; Cruickshank and Haefele 200l; Darling-Hammond 2001; Peart and Campbell 1999	Apprentice Capacity Builder Compassionate, tolerant, open-minded, motivating, nurturing, firm, and dedicated Detail-oriented, self-aware and student aware Stable and reliable
Enthusiasm and motivation Attitude toward teaching	Rowan et al. 1997; Quek 2005 Hamre and Pianta 2005; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality 2003	Informal leader (Collins, 2007) modern-day "participatory leadership" Heartfelt commitment, passion, and vision to raise levels of achievement by nourishing academic, emotional, rational, vocational, and basic needs Consistency of guidance, purpose, direction, and dedication Self-assured confidently humble, and competent.
Reflective practice	Cruickshank and Haefele 2001; Good and Brophy 1997	Personal-Individualized tutoring & instruction computer programs, assistive technology, direct and small group instruction, guided practice

5.7 Recommendations & Implications of the Study

The purpose of this study was to use the art and science of portraiture to illuminate a charismatic, resilient, and effective teacher in the field of special education. Within this context, this qualitative single person case study examined the internal context (literal space and time), personal context (background, agenda, and rationale of the researcher), and historical context (ideological and cultural journey) of the teacher in this study. This study answered the following four research questions:

1. What characteristics of leadership have been shown to be successful when meeting the needs of students with disabilities?
2. How are the current challenges of incorporating high stakes testing affecting the curriculum along with individual lesson plans and Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities?
3. How are those challenges being successfully addressed by a veteran special education teacher who is considered to be a leader in the field?
4. What does it mean to be an effective teacher in the field of special education in the current educational climate?

Primarily, this study was for Grace and for all students with disabilities who are looking to competent and caring special education teachers to use their expertise as tailor-teachers to create meaningful educational opportunities to address their unique needs and untapped potential.

The following implications are for special educators based on the research results from Catherine in the study. These implications are for both current practitioners in the field as well as pre-service teachers who are currently receiving teacher training in how to

work with students who are thought to be exceptional. The dispositions below not only contribute to a void in the knowledge base of special education, but also provide a framework for special educators to become a catalyst for a child's success in school.

1. Employ a holistic approach that encourages each student to feel valued, respected, loved, and successful.

2. Be a diplomat and ambassador for your students and profession.

3. Think outside the box and be a creative, knowledgeable, and thorough planner who makes use of all available formal and natural supports.

4. Provide a strong, structured, and stable environment that addresses the basic, academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and transitional needs of each child.

5. Be a life-long learner who is current with both professional knowledge and pedagogical approaches.

Building on the implications above are the following recommendations for special education teachers:

1. Know each student and do no harm. Intimately know their strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, concerns, opinions, ideas, dreams, and passions.

2. Be a hands-on leader and role-model that leads by example and models the way for your students and colleagues.

3. Become well acquainted with teachers, paraprofessionals, and school support personnel who can assist in educating each of your students. Be aware of and actively involved in the community with parents, friends, recreation centers, service providers, clubs, social and civic organizations, and volunteer and work providers who can support each of your students and enrich their lives.

4. Be highly skilled with assessment and collecting observational data with each of your students. Plan effective intervention plans to meet the varied needs of each child and include systematic strategies for intervention in each student's IEP.

5. Become a highly qualified special education teacher who seeks on-going training in best practices, collaboration, team teaching, and intervention strategies.

5.8 Suggestions for Further Studies and Illumination

This study was limited to one special educator. This special education teacher is a veteran high school teacher who has spent her career teaching in public education. The study took place in an economically disadvantaged school district in Pennsylvania. The school population was primarily Caucasian students from middle-and lower-income families. The high school serviced students in grades 9-12. The teacher in this study has spent her career working solely with high school-aged students. It would be interesting to ascertain whether the findings in this study are common across various school settings.

Suggestions for further research studies include the following:

- A comparative study could be conducted that compares several successful high school special education teachers to see if the findings mirror this single person case study.
- A comparative study could be conducted that compares and contrasts several high school special education teachers in different socio-economic regions to see if the region determines in some way the effectiveness of the teacher.
- A comparison study of teachers; a novice special education teacher, and a seasoned special education teacher to compare their pedagogy, practices, and belief structures.

Suggestions for illumination include the following:

- Use the study as a model for self-reflection to analyze the effectiveness of an individual special educator.
- Use the study as a model to see if special educators in a school district exhibit characteristics of an effective teacher.
- Use the study as model for collaboration for special educators and general educators.

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